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By Florence Warden,

Author of "The Mystery of the Inn by the Shore," etc.

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A Novel.

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FLORENCE WARDEN,

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THE WHARF BY THE DOCKS.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING AMISS.

EVERYBODY knows Canterbury, with its Old-World charms and its ostentatious air of being content to be rather behind the times, of looking down upon the hurrying Americans who dash through its cathedral and take snap-shots at its slums, and at all those busy moderns who cannot afford to take life at its own jog-trot pace.

But everybody does not know the charming old halls and comfortable, old-fashioned mansions which are dotted about the neighboring country, either nestling in secluded nooks of the Kentish valleys or holding a stately stand on the wooded hills.

Of this latter category was The Beeches, a pretty house of warm, red brick, with a dignified Jacobean front, which stood upon the highest ground of a prettily wooded park, and commanded one of those soft, undulating, sleepy landscapes which are so characteristically English, and of which grazing

sheep and ruminating cows form so important a feature. A little tame, perhaps, but very pleasant, very homely, very sweet to look upon by the tired eyes that have seen enough of the active, bustling world

Mr. George Wedmore, of the firm of Wedmore, Parkinson & Bishop, merchants of the city of London, had bought back the place, which had formerly belonged to his family, from the Jews into whose hands it had fallen, and had settled there to spend in retirement the latter end of his life, surrounded by a family who were not too well pleased to exchange busy Bayswater for what they were flippant enough to call a wilderness.

Dinner was over; and Mr. Wedmore, in a snug easy-chair by the dining-room fire, was waiting for Doctor Haselden, who often looked in for a smoke and a game of chess with the owner of The Beeches.

A lean, fidgety man, with thin hair and grayish whiskers, Mr. Wedmore looked less at home in the velveteen suit and gaiters which he persisted in wearing even in the evening, less like the country gentleman it was his ambition to be, than like the care-laden city merchant he at heart still was.

On the other side of the table sat his better half, in whom it was easy to see he must have found all

the charm of contrast to his own personality. A cheery, buxom woman, still handsome, full of life and fun, she had held for the whole of her married life a sway over her lord and master all the greater that neither of them was conscious of the fact. A most devoted and submissive wife, a most indulgent and affectionate mother, Mrs. Wedmore occupied the not unenviable position of being half slave, half idol in her own household.

The clock struck eight, and the bell rang.

"There he is! There's the doctor!" cried Mrs. Wedmore, with a beaming nod. Her husband sat up in his chair, and the troubled frown which he had worn all the evening grew a little deeper.

"I should like you, my dear, to leave us together this evening," said he.

Mrs. Wedmore jumped up at once, gathering her balls of wool and big knitting-needles together with one quick sweep of the arm.

"All right, dear," said she, with another nod, giving him an anxious look.

Mr. Wedmore perceived the look and smiled. He stretched out his hand to lay it gently on his wife's arm as she passed him.

"Nothing about me. Nothing for you to be alarmed about," said he.

Mrs. Wedmore hesitated a moment. She had her

suspicions, and she would dearly have liked to know more. But she was the best trained of wives; and after a moment's pause, seeing that she was to hear nothing further, she said, good-humoredly: "All right, dear," and left the room, just in time to shake hands with Doctor Haselden as she went out.

Now, while the host found it impossible to shake off the signs of his old calling, the doctor was a man who had never been able to assume them. From head to foot there was no trace of the doctor in his appearance; he looked all over what at heart he was—the burly, good-humored, home-loving, land-loving country gentleman, who looked upon Great Datton, where his home was, as the pivot of the world.

However he was dressed, he always looked shabby, and he could never have been mistaken for anything but an English gentleman.

He shook hands with Mr. Wedmore, with a smile. These poor Londoners, trying to acclimatize themselves, amused him greatly. He looked upon them much as the Londoner looks upon the Polish Jew immigrants—with pity, a little jealousy, and no little scorn.

"Where 's Carlo?" asked he.

"Oh, Carlo was a nuisance, so I 've sent him to the stable," said Mr. Wedmore, with the slightly

colder manner which he instantly assumed if any grievance of his, however small, was touched upon.

Carlo was a young retriever, which Mr. Wedmore, in the stern belief that it was the proper thing in a country house, had encouraged about the house until his habits of getting between everybody's legs and helping himself to the contents of everybody's plate had so roused the ire of the rest of the household that Mr. Wedmore had had to give way to the universal prejudice against him.

The doctor shook his head. Lack of capacity for managing a dog was just what one might have expected from these new-comers.

Mr. Wedmore turned his chair to face that of the doctor, and spoke in the sharp, incisive tones of a man who has serious business on hand.

"I 've been hoping you would drop in every night for the last fornight," said he, "and as you didn't come, I was at last obliged to send for you. I have a very important matter to consult you about. You 've brought your pipe?" The doctor produced it from his pocket. "Well, fill it, and listen. It 's about young Horne—Dudley Horne—that I want to speak to you, to consult you, in fact."

The doctor nodded as he filled his pipe.

"The young barrister I 've met here, who 's engaged to your elder daughter?"

"Well, she was all but engaged to him," admitted Mr. Wedmore, in a grudging tone. "But I'm going to put a stop to it, and I'll tell you why." Here he got up, as if unable to keep still in the state of excitement into which he was falling, and stood with his hands behind him and his back to the fire. "I have a strong suspicion that the young man's not quite right here." And lowering his voice, Mr. Wedmore touched his forehead.

"Good gracious! You surprise me!" cried the doctor. "He always seemed to me such a clever young fellow. Indeed, you said so to me yourself."

"So he is. Very clever," said Mr. Wedmore, shortly. "I don't suppose there are many young chaps of his age—for he's barely thirty—at the Bar whose prospects are as good as his. But, for all that, I have a strong suspicion that he's got a tile loose, and that's why I wanted to speak to you. Now his father was in a lunatic asylum no less than three times, and was in one when he died."

The doctor looked grave.

"That's a bad history, certainly. Do you know how the father's malady started?"

"Why, yes. It was the effect of a wound in the head received when he was a young man out in America, in the war with Mexico in '46."

"That isn't the sort of mania that is likely to

come down from father to son," said the doctor, "if his brain was perfectly sound before, and the recurrent mania the result of an accident."

"Well, so I've understood. And the matter has never troubled me at all until lately, when I have begun to detect certain morbid tendencies in Dudley, and a general change which makes me hesitate to trust him with the happiness of my daughter."

"Can you give me instances?" asked the doctor, although he began to feel sure that whatever opinion he might express on the matter, Mr. Wedmore would pay little attention to any but his own.

"Well, for you to understand the case, I must tell you a little more about the lad's father. He and I were very old friends—chums from boyhood, in fact. When he came back from America—where he went from a lad's love of adventure—he made a good marriage from a monetary point of view; married a wharf on the Thames, in fact, somewhere Limehouse way, and settled down as a wharfinger. He was a steady fellow, and did very well, until one fine morning he was found trying to cut his throat, and had to be locked up. Well, he was soon out again that time, and things went on straight enough for eight or nine years, by which time he had done very well—made a lot of money by speculation—and was thinking of retiring from business alto-

gether. Then, perhaps it was the extra pressure of his increased business, but, at any rate, he broke out again, tried to murder his wife that time, and did, in fact, injure her so much that she died shortly afterward. Of course, he had to be shut up again; and a man named Edward Jacobs, a shrewd Jew, who was his confidential clerk, carried on the business in his absence. Now, both Horne and his wife had had the fullest confidence in this Jacobs, but he turned out all wrong. As soon as he learned, at the end of about twelve months, that Horne was coming out again, he decamped with everything he could lay his hands on; and from the position of affairs you may guess that he made a very good haul. Well, poor Horne found himself in a maze of difficulties; in fact, his clerk's fraud ruined him. Everything that could be sold or mortgaged had to go to the settlement, and when his affairs had been finally put straight, there was only a little bit left, that had been so settled upon his wife that no one could touch it. He made a good fight of it for a little while, with the help of a few old friends, but, in the end, he broke down again for the third time. But he escaped out of the asylum and went abroad, without seeing his friends or his child, and a few months afterward the announcement of his death in an American asylum was sent by a correspondent

out there. Happily there were no difficulties about securing the mother's money for the son, and it was enough to educate the boy and to give him a start; but, of course, he had to begin the world as a poor man instead of a rich one. Perhaps that was all the better for him—or so I thought until lately."

"And what are these signs of a morbid tendency that you spoke of?" asked the doctor.

"Well, in the first place, after being almost extravagant in his devotion to my daughter, Doreen, he now neglects her outrageously—comes down very seldom, writes short letters or none. Now, my daughter is not the sort of girl that a sane man would neglect," added Doctor Wedmore, proudly.

"Certainly not," assented the doctor, inwardly thinking that it was much less surprising than it would have been in the case of one of his own girls.

"In the second place, he is always harping upon the subject of Jacobs and his peculations—an old subject, which he might well let rest. And, in the third place, he has become moody, morose and absent-minded; and my son, Max, who often visits him at his chambers in Lincoln's Inn, has noticed the change even more than I, who have fewer opportunities of seeing him."

The doctor was puffing stolidly at his pipe and looking at the fire.

"It is very difficult to form an opinion upon report only," said he. "Frankly, I can see nothing in what you have told me about the young man which could not be explained in other and likelier ways. He may have got entangled, for instance, with some woman in London."

Mr. Wedmore took fire at this suggestion.

"In that case, the sooner Doreen forgets all about him the better."

"Mind, I 'm only suggesting!" put in the doctor, hastily. "There may be a dozen more reasons—"

"I shall not wait to find them out," said Mr. Wedmore, decisively. "He and Max are coming down together this evening. My wife would have them to help in organizing some affair they 're getting up for Christmas. I 'll send him to the right-about without any more nonsense."

"But surely that is hardly—"

"Hardly what?" snapped out Mr. Wedmore, as he poked the fire viciously.

"Well, hardly fair to either of the young people. Put a few questions to him yourself, or better still, let your wife do it. It may be only a storm in a teacup, after all. Remember, he is the son of your old friend. And you wouldn't like to have it on your conscience that you had treated him harshly."

The doctor's advice was sane and sound enough,

but Mr. Wedmore was not in the mood to listen to it. That notion of an entanglement with another woman rankled in his proud mind, and made him still less inclined to be patient and forbearing.

"I shall give Doreen warning of what I am going to do at once," said he, "before Horne turns up."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He was obstinate himself.

Mr. Wedmore crossed the long room to the door, and opened it sharply.

The hall was full of people and of great bales of goods, which were piled upon the center-table and heaped up all around it.

"Doreen!" he called, sharply.

Out of the crowd there rushed a girl—such a girl! One of those radiant creatures who explain the cult of womanhood; who make it difficult even for sober-minded, middle-aged men and matrons to realize that this is nothing but flesh and blood like themselves; one of those beautiful creatures who claim worship as a right and who repay it with kindness and brightness and sweetness and laughter.

No house was ever dull that held Doreen Wedmore.

She was a tall girl, brown-haired, brown-eyed, made to laugh and to live in the sunshine. Nobody could resist her, and nobody ever tried to.

She sprang across the hall to her father and whirled him back into the dining-room, and put her back against it.

"Dudley's come!" said she. "He's in the hall—among the blankets!"

"Blankets!"

"Yes." She was crossing the room by this time to the doctor, whom she had quickly perceived, and was holding out her hand to him. "You must know, doctor, that we are up to our eyes in blankets just now, and in bundles of red flannel, and in soup and coals. Papa has been reading up Christmas in the country in the olden time, and he finds that to be correct you must deluge the neighborhood with those articles. They are not at all what the people want, as far as I can make out. But that doesn't matter. It pleases papa to demoralize the neighborhood; so we're doing it. And mamma helps him. She dates from the prehistoric period when a wife *really* swore to obey her husband; so she does it through thick and thin. Of course, she knows better all the time. She could always set papa right if she chose. Whatever happens, papa must be obeyed. So when he wants to run his dear old head into a noose, she dutifully holds it open for him, when all the time she knows how uncomfortable he 'll be till he gets out."

"You 're a saucy puss, Miss!" cried her father, trying to frown, but betraying his delight in his daughter's merry tongue by the twinkle in his eyes.

"And that 's the right sort of woman for a wife," said the old doctor, enthusiastically. "I must say I think it 's a bad sign when young girls think they can improve upon their own mothers."

"She doesn't mean half she says," said her father, indulgently.

"Oh, yes, she does," retorted Doreen. "And she wants to know, please, what it is you have to say to Dudley."

The doctor rose from his chair, and Mr. Wedmore frowned.

"And it 's no use putting me off by telling me not to ask questions. I 'm not mamma, you know."

"I intend to ask him—something about you."

It was the girl's turn to frown now.

"Please don't, papa," said she, in a lower voice. "I know you 're going to worry him, and to put your hands behind your back and ask him conundrums, and to make all sorts of mischief, under the impression that you are putting things right. And if you only just wouldn't, everything would soon be as right as possible. While if you persist—"

But Mr. Wedmore interrupted her, not harshly,

as he would have done anybody else, but with decision.

"You must trust me to know best, my dear. It is better for you both that we should come to some understanding. Haselden, you 'll excuse me for half an hour, won't you? And you, Doreen," and he turned again to his daughter, "stay with the doctor here, and try to talk sense till I come back again."

And Mr. Wedmore went quickly out of the room, without giving the girl a chance of saying anything more.

CHAPTER II.

MAX MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Doreen's bright face lost a little of its color and much of its gayety as her father disappeared. The doctor felt sorry for her.

"Come, come; cheer up, my dear," he said. "If he loves you honestly, and I don't know how he can fail to do so, a few words with your father will put matters all right. There is nothing to look so sad about, I think."

But Doreen gave him one earnest, questioning look, and then her eyelids fell again.

"You don't know," she said, in a low voice. "Papa doesn't understand Dudley; but I think I do. He is very sensitive and rather reserved about himself. If papa interferes now, he will offend him, and Dudley may very likely go off at once, and perhaps never come near me again. He is proud—very proud."

"But if he could behave like that," replied the doctor, quickly, "if he could throw over such a

nice girl as you for no reason worth speaking of, I should call him a nasty-tempered fellow, whom you ought to be glad to be rid of."

"Ah, but you would be wrong," retorted Doreen, with a little flush in her face, "It is quite true that he has neglected me a little lately, written short letters, and not been down to see me so often. But I am sure there was some better reason for his conduct than papa thinks. And if I feel so sure, and if I am ready to trust him, why shouldn't papa be?"

The doctor smiled at her ingenuousness.

"Your father is right in claiming that he ought to be made acquainted with the young man's reason for conduct which looks quite unwarrantable on the face of it," said he.

But Doreen gave a little sigh.

"I don't think that a man has a right to turn inquisitor over another man, just because the second man is ready to marry the first man's daughter," said she. "And I 'm sure papa wouldn't have stood it when *he* was young."

The doctor laughed.

"He ought to put up with any amount of questioning rather than lose the girl of his choice," said he decisively. "And if he has the stuff of a man in him he will do so."

"But he is unhappy. I know it," said Doreen.

"Unhappy!" cried the doctor, indignantly. "And what's he got to be unhappy about, I should like to know? He ought to be thanking Heaven on his knees all day long for getting such a nice girl to promise to marry him. That's the attitude a young man used to take when I was young."

"Did you go down on your knees all day long when Mrs. Haselden promised to marry you?" asked Doreen, recovering her sauciness at the notion. "And why should he do it till he knows what sort of a wife I am going to make? And why should he go down on his knees more than I on mine? When there are more women in the world than men, too!"

The doctor shook his head.

"Ah, there is no arguing with you saucy girls," said he. "But I know that I, for my part, don't know of a man in the whole world who is worthy to marry one of my daughters."

As the doctor finished speaking, the door was opened quickly, and Mr. Wedmore came in, looking white and worried.

Doreen ran to him with an anxious face.

"What have you done, papa, what have you done? Did you see him? What did you say? What did you say?"

Mr. Wedmore put his arm around his daughter, and kissed her tenderly.

"Don't trouble your head about him any more, my dear child," said he in a husky voice. "He isn't worth it. He isn't worthy of you."

Doreen drew away from her father, looking into his face with searching eyes and with an expression full of fear.

"Papa, what do you mean? You have sent him away?"

Mr. Wedmore answered in a loud and angry voice; but it was clear enough that the anger was not directed against his daughter.

"I did not send him away. He took himself off. I had hardly begun to speak to him—and I began quite quietly, mind—when he made the excuse of a letter which he found waiting for him, to go back to town. Without any ceremony, he rushed out of the study into the hall, and snatched up his hat and coat to go."

"And is he gone?" asked Doreen, in a low voice, as she staggered back a step.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. And a good riddance, too. There was no letter at all for him, I suppose."

"Yes, there was a letter!" faltered Doreen.

She gave a glance round her; seemed to remem-

ber suddenly the presence of a third person, for she blushed deeply on meeting the doctor's eyes; then, without another word, she sprang across the room to the door.

"Where are you going?" cried her father, as he followed her into the hall.

But she did not answer. The hall-door was closing with a loud clang.

Doreen was not the girl to lose her lover for want of a little energy. She was fonder of Dudley than people imagined. There is always an inclination in the general mind to consider that a person of lively temperament is incapable of a deep feeling. And Mr. Wedmore had only shown a common tendency in believing that his beautiful and brilliant daughter would easily give up the lover whom he considered unworthy of her. But he was wrong. Much too high-spirited and too happy in her temperament and surroundings to brood over her lover's late negligence, she was perhaps too vain to believe that she had lost her hold upon his heart. At any rate, she liked him too well to give him up in this off-hand fashion without making an effort to discover the reason of his present mysterious conduct.

That letter which he had used as an excuse for his sudden departure had arrived at The Beeches by the afternoon post. Doreen had seen it with her

own eyes; had noted with some natural curiosity that the direction was ill-spelled, ill-written; that the chirography was that of an almost illiterate female correspondent; and that the post-mark showed that it came from the East End of London. Rather a strange letter for the smart young barrister to receive, perhaps. And the thought of it made Doreen pause when she had got outside the door on the broad drive between the lawns.

Only for the moment. The next she was flying across the rougher grass outside the garden among the oaks and the beeches of the park. She saw no one in front of her, and for a few seconds her heart beat very fast. She thought she had missed him.

There was no lodge at the park entrance; only a modest wooden gate in the middle of the fence. Doreen was hesitating whether to go through or to go back, when she saw the figure of Dudley Horne coming toward the gate from the stables.

So she waited.

As he came nearer, she, hidden from his sight by the trunk of an old oak-tree, grew uneasy and shy. Dark though it was, dimly as she could see him, Doreen felt convinced, from the rapid, steady pace at which he walked, that he was intent upon some set purpose, that he was not driven by pique at her father's words.

He came quite close to her, so that she saw his face. A dark-complexioned, strong face it was, clean-shaven, not handsome at all. But, on the other hand, it was just such a face as women admire; full of character, of ambition, of virility. Doreen had been debating with herself whether she dared speak to him; but the moment she got a full look at his face, her courage died away.

It was plain to her that, whatever might be the subject of the thoughts which were agitating his mind, she had no share in them.

So she let him pass out, and then crept back, downcast, shocked, ashamed, up the slope to the house.

She got in by the billiard-room, at the window of which she knocked. Max, her brother, who was playing a game with Queenie, his younger sister, let her in, and cried out at sight of her white face:

"Hello! Doreen, what's up? Had a row with Dudley? Or what?"

"I have had no 'row' with any one," answered the girl, very quietly. "But—you must all know all about it presently, so you may as well hear it at once—Dudley has gone away."

"What?"

Max stopped in the act of trying for a carom, and stared at his sister.

"Why, he only came when I did, ten minutes ago!"

"He 's gone, I tell you!" repeated Doreen, stamping her foot. "And—and listen, Max, I 'm frightened about him! He 's got something on his mind. When he went away, I saw him; I was standing by the gate; he looked so—so *dreadful* that I didn't dare to speak to him. *I!* Think of that!"

"Had papa been speaking to him?" put in the shrewd younger sister, who was chalking her cue at the other end of the room.

The younger sister always sees most of the game.

"Ye—es, but—I don't know—I hardly think it was that," answered Doreen quickly. "At any rate, Max, I want you to do this for me; I want you to go up to town to-morrow and see him. I shan't rest until I know he 's—he 's all right—after what I saw of his face and the look on it. Now, you will do this, won't you, won't you? Without saying anything to anybody, mind. Queenie, you can hold hold your tongue, too. Now, Max, there 's a dear, you 'll do it, won't you?"

Max told her that she was "off her head," that he could do no good, and so on. But he ended in giving way to the will of his handsome sister, whom he adored.

Max Wedmore was a good-looking fellow of five-and-twenty, with a reputation as a ne'er-do-weel, which, perhaps, he hardly deserved. His father had a great idea of bringing the young man up to some useful calling to keep him out of mischief. Not very terrible mischief, for the most part; only the result of too much leisure and too much money in inexperienced hands. The upshot of this difference of opinion between father and son was that while Mr. Wedmore was lways finding mercantile situations for his son, Max was always taking care to be thrown out of them after a few weeks, and taking a rest which was by no means well earned.

This errand of his sister's was by no means unwelcome to him, since it took him back to town, where he could amuse himself better than he could in the country.

So, on the following morning, he found some sort of excuse to take him up, and started on his journey with the blessings of Doreen, and with very little opposition from his father, who was subdued and thankful to have got rid of Dudley with so little trouble.

It was soon after three when Max arrived at Dudley Horne's chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Of course, Dudley was out; so Max scribbled a note for his friend and left it on the table while he went to

the Law Courts to look for him. Not finding him anywhere about, Max filled up the day in his own fashion, and returned to Dudley's room at about seven o'clock, when he supposed that his friend would either return to dinner or look in on his way to dine elsewhere.

He waited an hour, then went away and filled up his time at a music-hall, and returned once more at a quarter to eleven. Dudley, so he was told by the old woman who gave him the information, had not, as far as she knew, been in his rooms since the morning.

Max, who was a great friend of Dudley's, and could take any liberty he pleased in his precincts, lit the gas and the sitting-room fire, and installed himself in an arm-chair with a book. He could not read, however, for he was oppressed by some of Doreen's own fears. He was well acquainted with all his friend's ways, and he knew that for him to be away both from his chambers and from the neighborhood of the Courts for a whole day was most unusual with that particularly steady, plodding young man. He began to worry himself with the remembrance that Dudley had not been himself of late, that he had been moody, restless and unsettled without apparent cause.

Finally, Max worked himself into such a state of

anxiety about his friend that when he at last heard the key turned in the lock of the outer door, he jumped up excitedly and made a rush for the door.

Before he reached it, however, he heard footsteps in the adjoining bedroom, the heavy tread of a man stumbling about in the dark, the overthrowing of some of the furniture.

Surely that could not be Dudley!

Max stood still at the door, listening. He thought it might be a thief who had got hold of the key of the chambers.

As he stood still, close by the wall, the door which led from the one room to the other was thrown open from the bedroom, almost touching him as it fell back; and there staggered into the sitting-room, into the light thrown by the gas and the fire, a figure which Max could scarcely recognize as Dudley Horne. His face was the grayish white of the dead; his eyes were glassy; his lips were parted; while the grime of a London fog had left its black marks round his mouth and eyes, giving him an appearance altogether diabolical. He was shaking like a leaf as he stumbled against a chair and suddenly wheeled round to the light.

Then, unbuttoning his overcoat quickly, he looked down at his clothes underneath. He passed his

hand over them and held it in the light, with a shudder.

Max uttered a sharp cry.

The stain on Dudley's hand, the wet patches which glistened on his dark clothes, were stains of blood.

CHAPTER III.

DUDLEY EXPLAINS.

As the cry of horror escaped the lips of Max, Dudley wheeled quickly round and met his eyes.

For a moment the two men stood staring at each other without uttering a word. It seemed to Max that his friend did not recognize him; that he looked like a hunted man brought to bay by his pursuer, with the furtive expression in his eyes of a creature trying to devise some means of escape.

It was the most shocking experience that Max had ever known, and the blood seemed to freeze in his veins as he stood by the table watching his friend, trying to conjure back a smile to his own face and look of welcome into his own eyes.

He found his voice at last.

"Why, Horne," cried he, and he was angry with

MAX SCARCELY RECOGNIZED THE FIGURE THAT STAGGERED INTO THE SITTING-ROOM.—*See Page* 31.

himself as he noted that his voice was hoarse and tremulous, and that he could not manage to bring out his natural tones, "what have you been doing with yourself? I—I 've been backward and forward here all day long, and now I 've been waiting for you ever so long!"

There was a pause. Dudley was still staring at him, but there was gradually coming over his face a change which showed recognition, followed by annoyance. He drew himself up, and, after a pause, asked, stiffly:

"What did you want with me?"

He spoke more naturally than Max had managed to do, and as the latter replied, he took out his pocket-handkerchief very calmly and began to wipe the stain off his right hand.

Max shuddered.

"Why, is it such a very unusual thing for me to drop in upon you and to want to see you?" he asked, with another attempt at his ordinary manner, which failed almost as completely as the first had done.

There was another short pause. Dudley, without looking again at his friend, examined his hand, saw that it was now clean, and replaced the soiled handkerchief in his pocket. He seemed by this time to be thoroughly at his ease, but Max was not deceived.

"Of course not," said Dudley, quickly. "I only meant that—considering"—he paused, and seemed to be trying to recollect something—"considering what took place down at Datton yesterday and how anxious your father seemed to be rid of me—"

"But what has my father got to do with me, as far as you are concerned, Dudley, eh?" said Max.

There had come upon him suddenly such a strong impression that his friend was in some awful difficulty, some scrape so terrible as to make him lonely beyond the reach of help, that Max, who was a good-hearted fellow and a stanch friend, spoke with something which might almost be called tenderness:

"We've always been chums, now, haven't we? And a row between you and Doreen, or between you and my father, wouldn't make any difference to me. I—I suppose you don't mean to give me the cold shoulder for the future, eh?"

Dudley had turned his back upon him, and was standing on the hearth-rug, looking down at the fire, in an attitude which betrayed to his friend the uneasiness from which he was suffering. It was an attitude of constraint, as different as possible from any in which Max had ever seen him.

Another pause. Dudley seemed unable on this occasion to give a simple answer to a simple ques-

tion without taking thought first. At last he laughed awkwardly and half turned toward Max.

"Why, of course not," said he, but without heartiness. "Of course not. Though it will be rather awkward, mind, for us to see much of each other just at first, after my having got kicked out like that, won't it?"

The tone in which Max answered betrayed considerable surprise and perplexity.

"Kicked out!" he exclaimed. "My father said he hardly got a word out before you took yourself off in a huff."

Dudley turned round quickly and faced him this time, with a sullen look of defiance on his dark face.

"Well, the wise man doesn't wait to be kicked out," said he. "He removes himself upon the slightest hint that such a proceeding on his part would be well received."

"You were a little too quick on this occasion," replied Max, dryly, "for my father has got himself into hot water, and mother had a fit of crying, while Doreen—"

Something made Max hesitate to tell his friend how Doreen had taken his desertion. Max himself was ready to stand by his friend, whatever difficulties the latter might be in. But Doreen, his lovely sister, must have a lover without reproach.

At the mention of the girl's name there came a slight change over Dudley's face—a change which struck the sensitive Max and touched him deeply. Dudley took a step in the direction of his bedroom, and pulled out his watch. As he did so a railroad ticket jerked out of his pocket with the watch and fell to the ground.

Max saw it fall, but before he could pick it up or draw attention to it his ideas were diverted by Dudley's next words:

"Well, you 'll excuse me, old chap. I 've got to see a friend off by the midnight train to Liverpool."

As he spoke Dudley turned, with his hand on the door, to cast a glance at Max. He seemed to be asking himself what he should tell the other. And then he took a step toward his friend and began an explanation, which, as his shrewd eyes told him, Max required.

"The fact is that I got into the way of a beastly accident at Charing Cross just now. Woman run over—badly hurt. Got myself covered with blood. Ugh!"

Max was convinced that the shudder was genuine, although he had doubts—of which he was ashamed—about the tale itself.

And how did that explain the proposed journey?

Dudley went on:

"I've only just got time to change my clothes and make myself decent. See you in a day or two. Sorry I can't stay and have a pipe with you and one of our 'hard-times' suppers."

He was on the point of disappearing into the inner room, when Max stopped him.

"Oh, but you can," said he. "I have something particular to say to you, and I can wait till you come back, if it's two o'clock, and I can bring in the supper myself."

Dudley frowned impatiently, and again he cast at Max the horrible, furtive look which had been his first greeting.

"That's impossible," said he, quickly. "I may have to go on to Liverpool myself. Good-night."

And he shut himself into the bedroom.

Max felt cold all over. After a few minutes' hesitation, he went out of the chambers, down the stairs and out of the house.

At the door a cab was waiting. The driver spoke to him the moment he stepped out on the pavement. Evidently he took him for Dudley, his late fare.

"The lady's got out an' gone off, sir. I hollered after her, but she wouldn't wait. Oh, beg pardon, sir," and the man touched his hat, perceiving his

mistake; "I took you for the gentleman I brought here with the lady."

"Oh, he 'll be down in a minute or two," answered Max.

And then he thought he would wait and see what new developments the disappearance of the lady would lead to. He was getting sick with alarm about his friend. These instances of the blood-stained clothes, the possible journey to Liverpool, and the flight of the mysterious lady, were so suspicious, taken in conjunction with each other, that Max found it impossible to rest until he knew more. He walked a little way along the pavement, and then returned slowly in the middle of the road. He had done this for the third time when Dudley dashed out of the house with rapid steps, and had reached the step of the hansom before he discovered that the vehicle was empty.

An exclamation of dismay escaped his lips, and to the cabman's statement of the lady's disappearance he replied by asking sharply in which direction she had gone. On receiving the information he wanted, he gave the man his fare, and walked rapidly away in the direction the cabman had indicated.

Max followed.

Every moment increased his belief that some appalling circumstance had occurred by which

Dudley's mind had for the time lost its balance. Every word, look and movement on the part of his friend betrayed the fact. Now he was evidently setting off in feverish haste in pursuit of this woman whom he had left in the cab; and Max, who believed that his friend was on the brink of an attack of the insanity which old Mr. Wedmore feared, resolved to dog his footsteps, and not to let his friend go out of his sight until the latter got safely back to his chambers.

Dudley went at a great pace into Holborn, and then he stopped. The traffic had dwindled down to an occasional hansom and to a thin line of foot-passengers on the pavements. He looked to right, to left, and then he turned suddenly and came face to face with Max.

"Hello!" cried he. "Where are you going to? Where are you putting up?"

"At the Arundel," answered Max, taken aback, and stammering a little.

Dudley had recovered his usual tones.

"Come to my club," said he. "We can get some supper there and have that pipe."

"But how about Liverpool and the friend you had to see off?" asked Max.

Dudley hesitated ever so slightly.

"Oh, he 's given me the slip," he answered, in a

tone which sounded careless enough. "Gone off without waiting for me. So my conscience is free on his score."

Max said nothing for a moment. Then he thought himself justified in setting a trap for his friend.

"Who is he?" asked he. "Anybody I know?"

"No," replied Dudley. "A man I met in the country, who showed me a good deal of kindness. From Yorkshire. Man named Browning. Very good fellow, but erratic. Said he'd wait for me in the cab, and disappeared before I could come down. Had an idea I should make him lose his train, I suppose. Well, never mind him. Come along."

Max went with him in silence. Dudley had not only got back his usual spirits, but seemed to be in a mood of loquacity and liveliness unusual with him. When they got to the club, he ordered oysters and a bottle of champagne, and drank much more freely than was his custom.

It was Max, the ne'er-do-weel, the extravagant one, who drank little and did the listening. Dudley had cast off altogether the gravity and taciturnity which sometimes got him looked upon as a bit of a prig, and chatted and told his friend stories, with a tone and manner of irresponsible gayety which became him ill.

And Max, who was usually the talker, listened as badly as the other told his stories. For all the time he was weighed down with the fear, so strong that it seemed to amount to absolute knowledge, of some horrible danger hanging over his friend.

Abruptly, before he made the expected comment on the last of Dudley's stories, Max rose from his chair and said he must go home.

"I 'll see you as far as your diggings first," said he. "It 's not much out of way, you know."

At these words Dudley's high spirits suddenly left him, and the furtive look came again into his face.

"Oh," said he, "oh, very well. And on the way I can tell you the whole story of the accident that I saw at Charing Cross, this evening, just before I met you."

So they went out together, and Dudley, as he had suggested, gave his friend a long and extremely circumstantial account of the way in which the wheel went over the woman, and of the difficulty he and the policeman had experienced in getting her from between the wheels of the van by which she had been crushed.

Max heard him in silence, but did not believe a word. Whatever had reduced Dudley to the plight in which he had returned to his chambers, Max was convinced that it differed in some important

details from the version of the affair which he chose to give.

"We won't talk any more about it," he went on, without seeming to remark his friend's silence. "It 's a thing I want to forget. It has quite upset me for a time; you could see that yourself when you met me. I—I don't know quite what to do to get the thing out of my mind. I think I shall run down to Datton with you, and see what that will do. What do you think?"

Now, although he had drunk more wine than usual, Dudley knew perfectly well what he was saying, and Max stared at him in astonishment.

"What!" he exclaimed. "After what you told me! About my father!"

"Oh, yes, yes. But I can explain everything. I can, and I will," returned Dudley, quickly. "I have not been myself lately. I have had certain business worries. But they are all settled now, and I feel more like myself than I have done for weeks."

Max stopped short and stared at his friend by the light of a gas-lamp.

"Well, you don't look it," said he, shortly.

Dudley laughed loudly, but rather uneasily.

"Don't you think I could give an explanation which would satisfy your father, if I wished?" he asked, with a sudden relapse into gravity.

"I'm hanged if I know," retorted Max, energetically. "You haven't given any explanation which would satisfy *me*."

Dudley stared into his face for a few seconds inquiringly, and then quietly hooked his arm and led him along the Strand.

"You don't want to be satisfied, old chap," said he, in a low voice. "You know me."

Again Max was deeply touched. This was a sudden and unexpected peep under the surface of deception into the real heart of his old chum. He replied only by a slight twitching of the arm Dudley had taken.

They walked on at a quicker pace, and ran up the stairs to the door of Dudley's rooms in silence.

Dudley went first into the sitting-room and turned up the gas. It did not escape Max that he shot a hurried glance around the room, taking in every corner, as he entered. Talking all the time about the cold and the fog, Dudley went into the adjoining room, and Max saw him pull aside the bed-curtains and look behind them.

Then Max, not wishing to play the spy on his friend, turned his back; and as he did so he caught sight of the railway ticket which had fallen to the floor from Dudley's pocket before they went out.

Max picked it up, and noted that it was the return

half of a first-class return ticket from Fenchurch Street to Limehouse, and that it was dated that very day.

He had scarcely noted this, mechanically rather than with any set purpose, when he was startled to find Dudley at his elbow.

Max turned round quickly, but Dudley's eyes were fixed upon the railway ticket.

"You dropped this when you—" began Max, handing it to his friend.

It was not until then, when Dudley took the ticket from him and tossed it into the fireplace with a careless nod, that it flashed into the mind of Max that the incident had some significance.

What on earth had Dudley been doing at Limehouse? His parents had had property there, certainly, many years ago. But not a square foot of the grimy, slimy, auriferous Thames-side land, not a brick or a beam of the warehouses and sheds which had been theirs in the old days, had descended to Dudley. Owing to the fraudulent action of Edward Jacobs, all had had to go.

CHAPTER IV.

A PARAGRAPH IN "THE STANDARD."

Max did not stay long with his friend, but made the excuse that he was half asleep, after a few minutes' rather desultory conversation, to go back to his hotel.

It was with the greatest reluctance that he left his friend alone; but Dudley had given him intimations, in every look and tone and movement, that he wished to be by himself; and this fact increased the heaviness of heart with which Max, full of forebodings on his friend's account, had gone reluctantly down the creaking stairs.

Again and again Max asked himself, during his short walk from Lincoln's Inn to Arundel Street, why he had not had the courage to put a question or two straightforwardly to Dudley. As a matter of fact, however, the reason was simple enough. The relative positions of the two men had been suddenly reversed, and neither of them, as yet, felt easy under the new conditions.

Dudley, the hard-working student, the rising barrister, the abstemious, thoughtful, rather silent man to whom Max had looked up with respect and affection, had suddenly sunk, during the last few hours, by some unaccountable and mysterious means, to far below Max's own modest level. It was he, the careless fellow whom Dudley had formerly admonished, who had that evening been the sober, the temperate, the taciturn one; it was he who had watched the other, been solicitous for him, trembled for him.

Max could not understand. He lay awake worrying himself about his friend, feeling Dudley's fall more acutely than he would have felt his own, and did not fall asleep until it was nearly daylight.

In these circumstances he overslept himself, and it was eleven o'clock before he found himself in the hotel coffee-room, waiting for his breakfast.

He was in the act of pouring out his coffee, when his name, uttered behind him in a familiar voice, made him start. The next moment Dudley Horne stood by his side, and holding out his hand with a smile, seated himself on the chair beside him.

"I—I—I overslept myself this morning," stammered Max.

He was in a state of absolute bewilderment. Not only had the new Dudley of the previous night dis-

appeared, with his alternate depression and feverish high spirits, his furtive glances, his hoarse and altered voice, but the old Dudley, who had returned, seemed happier and livelier than usual.

"Town and its wicked ways don't agree with you, my boy, nor do they with me. If I were in your shoes, I shouldn't tread the streets of Babylon more than once a twelvemonth."

"You think that now," returned Max, "because you see more than enough of town."

"Well, I 'm not going to see much more of it at present," retorted Dudley. "This afternoon I 'm off again down to Datton, and I came to ask whether you were coming down with me."

"I thought you had had a row, at least a misunderstanding of some sort, with—with my father?"

"Why, yes, so I had," replied Dudley, serenely, as he took a newspaper out of his pocket and folded it for reading. "But I 've written to him already this morning, explaining things, and telling him that I propose to come down to The Beeches this evening. He 'll get it before I turn up, I should think, for I posted it at six o'clock this morning."

"Why, what were you doing at six o'clock in the morning?" said Max, in a tone of bewilderment, as before. "Didn't you go to bed at all last night?"

"No," answered Dudley, calmly. "I had some

worrying things to think about, and so I took the night to do it in."

A slight frown passed over his face as he spoke, but it disappeared quickly, leaving him as placid as before.

"About one of the things I can consult you, Max. You know something about it, I suppose. Do you think I have any chance with Doreen?"

Max stared at him again.

"You must be blind if you haven't seen that you have," he said, at last, in a sort of muffled voice, grudgingly. He moved uneasily in his seat, and added, in a hurried manner: "But, I say, you know, Dudley, after last night, I—I want to ask you something myself. I'm Doreen's brother, though I'm not much of a brother for such a nice girl as she is. And—and—what on earth did you think of going to Liverpool for *with a woman?* I've a right to ask that now, haven't I?"

Max blurted out these words in a dogged tone, not deterred from finishing his sentence by the fact that Dudley's face had grown white and hard, and that over his whole attitude there had come a rapid change.

There was a pause when the younger man had finished. Dudley kept his eyes down, and traced a pattern on the table-cloth with a fork, while Max

looked at him furtively. At last Dudley looked up quickly and asked, in a tone which admitted of no prevarication in the answer he demanded :

"You have been playing the spy upon me, I see. Tell me just how much you saw."

It was such a straightforward way of coming to the point that Max, taken aback, but rather thankful that the ground was to be cleared a little, answered at once without reserve :

"I did play the spy. It was enough to make me. I saw the hansom waiting outside your door last night ; the cabman mistook me for you, and told me the lady had walked away. I couldn't help putting that together with what you had told me about seeing a friend off to Liverpool, and, perhaps, going there yourself. Now, who could have helped it?"

Dudley did not at once answer. He just glanced inquiringly at the face of Max while he went on tracing the pattern on the cloth.

"You didn't see the lady," he said at last, not in a questioning tone, but with conviction.

"No."

"Well, if you had seen her you would have been satisfied that it was not her charms which were leading me astray," said he, with a faint smile. "Are you satisfied now, or do you still consider," he went on with a slight tone of mockery in his

voice, "that my character requires further investigation before you can accept me for a bother-in-law?"

Max moved uneasily again.

"What rot, Horne!" said he, impatiently. "You know very well I 've always wanted you to marry Doreen. I 've said so, lots of times. I still say it was natural I should want to understand your queer goings-on last night. And now—and now—"

"And now that you don't understand them any better than before, you are ready to take it for granted it 's all right?" broke in Dudley, with the same scoffing tone as before.

Max grew very red, began to speak, glanced at Dudley, and got up.

"Yes, I suppose that 's about the size of it," said he, stiffly.

"And are you going down with me to-night? I can catch the seven o'clock train."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. I 'll meet you at Charing Cross."

Max's enthusiasm on his friend's behalf had been much damped by his behavior, and he gave him a nod, turned on his heel and left him without another word. He gave up trying to understand the mystery which hung about Dudley, and left it to Doreen and to his father to unravel.

The two young men did not meet again, therefore, until seven that evening, when they took their seats in the same smoking-carriage. Max felt quite glad that the presence of a couple of strangers prevented any talk of a confidential sort between himself and Dudley, who on his side seemed perfectly contented to puff at his pipe in silence.

Dudley's letter had evidently been received, and well received, for at the station the two friends found the dog-cart waiting to take them the mile and a half which lay between the station and The Beeches.

At the house itself, too, the front door flew open at their approach, and Mr. Wedmore himself stood in the hall to welcome them.

Queenie was there. Mr. Wedmore was there. But there was never a glimpse of Doreen.

"I got your letter, my dear boy," began Mr. Wedmore, holding out his hand with so much heartiness that it was plain he was delighted to be able to forgive his old friend's son, "and I am very glad, indeed, that you have found your way back to us so soon. I am heartily glad to hear that the worries which have been making you depressed lately are over—heartily glad. And so, I am sure," added he, with a significant smile, "Doreen will be."

"Thank you, sir," said Dudley. "You are very

kind, very indulgent. I am not ungrateful, I assure you."

Max, behind them, was listening with attentive ears. He did not feel so sure as his father seemed to be that all was now well with Dudley.

"Where's Doreen?" he asked his younger sister.

"Don't know, I'm sure. She's taken herself off somewhere. Probably somebody else will find her quicker than you will."

The younger sister was right. The younger sister always is on these occasions.

Within five minutes of his arrival, Dudley found his way into the breakfast room, where Doreen, a pug dog and a raven were sitting together on the floor, surrounded by a frightful litter of paper and shavings and string, wooden boxes, hampers, and odds and ends of cotton wool.

She just looked up when Dudley came in, gave him a glance and a little cool nod, and then, as he attempted to advance, uttered a shrill little scream.

"One step farther, and my wax cupids will be ruined!"

"Wax cupids!" repeated Dudley, feebly.

"Yes, for my Christmas tree. It's to be the greatest success ever known in these parts, or the greatest failure. Nothing between. That's what I must always have—something sensational—some-

thing to make people howl at me, or to make them want to light bonfires in my honor. That's characteristic, isn't it?"

And Doreen, who was dressed in a black skirt, with a scarlet velvet bodice which did justice to her brilliant complexion and soft, dark hair, paused in the act of turning out a number of glittering glass balls into her lap.

"Very," said Dudley, as he made his way carefully to the nearest chair and sat down to look at her.

He was up to his knees in brown-paper parcels, over which barricade he stretched out his hand.

Doreen affected not to see it. She began to tie bits of fancy string into the little rings in the glass balls, cutting off the ends with a pair of scissors.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with me?" asked Dudley, impatiently.

Doreen answered without looking up.

"No. Not yet."

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh, I am offended."

"What have I done now?"

Doreen threw up her head.

"What have you *not* done? We have all of us—I among the others—had a good deal to put up with from you, lately, in the matter of what I will call general neglect. And you put a climax to it the

day before yesterday by rushing out of the house without a word of good-bye to anybody."

"There was a reason for it," interrupted Dudley, quickly.

"I suppose so. But I'm not going to take the reason on trust, Mr. Horne."

"Not if you're satisfied that you will meet with no more neglect in the future? That my conduct shall be in every respect what you—and the others—can desire?"

"Not even then," replied Doreen decisively.

"But if your father is satisfied?"

'Then go and talk to my father."

There was a pause and their eyes met. Dudley, who had acknowledged to himself the patience with which Doreen had put up with his recent neglect, was astonished by the resolution which he saw in her eyes.

"What is it you want to know?" he asked, in a condescending and indulgent tone.

"A great deal more than you will tell me," answered Doreen, promptly.

Whereat there was another pause. Dudley took up one of the brown-paper parcels and turned it over in his hands. Perhaps it was to hide the fact that an irrepressible tremor was running through his limbs.

If he had looked at her at that moment he would have seen in her eyes a touching look of sympathy and distress. The girl knew that something had been amiss with him—that something was amiss still. She cared for him. She wanted his confidence, or at least so much of it as would allow her to pour out upon him the tender sympathy with which her innocent heart was overflowing. And he would have none of it. He wanted to treat her like a beautiful doll, to be left in its cotton wool when his spirits were too low for playthings, and to be taken out and admired when things went better with him.

This was what Doreen mutinously thought and what her lips were on the point of uttering, when the door was opened by Mr. Wedmore, who came into the room with a copy of the *Evening Standard* in his hand.

"Look here, Horne, did you see this?" said he, as he folded the paper and handed it to Dudley. "Here's an odd thing. Of course it may be only a coincidence. But doesn't it seem to refer to the rascal who ruined your prospects—Edward Jacobs?"

"A middle-aged Jewish woman, who found some difficulty in making herself understood, from an impediment in her speech, applied to Mr. ——, of —— Street Police Court, for advice in the following circumstances: She and her husband had returned to England in reduced circumstances, after a long residence abroad,

and her husband was in search of employment. He had received a letter from Limehouse, offering him employment and giving him an appointment for yesterday afternoon, which he started to keep. He had not returned; she had been to Limehouse police station to make inquiries, but could learn nothing of her husband. She seemed to be under the impression that he had met with foul play, and made a rambling statement to the effect that he had 'enemies.' It was only after much persuasion, and the assurance that the press could not help her without the knowledge, that she gave her name as Jacobs, and her husband's first name as Edward. She described him as of the middle height, thin, with gray hair and a short gray beard. The magistrate said he had no doubt the press would do what they could to help her, and the woman withdrew."

Dudley Horne read this account, and gave the paper back to Mr. Wedmore.

He tried to speak as he did so, but, though his mouth opened, the voice refused to come.

CHAPTER V.

ONE MAN'S LOSS IS ANOTHER MAN'S GAIN.

"Confound the Christmas tree!" grumbled Mr. Wedmore, as he stumbled over a parcel of fluffy rabbits, whose heads screwed off to permit the insertion of sweets.

"Oh, papa, you 'll be saying 'Confound Christmas' next!"

And Doreen, with one watchful eye on Dudley all the time, made a lane through her boxes and her hampers to admit the passage of her father to a chair.

By this time Dudley had recovered himself a little, and was able to answer the question Mr. Wedmore now put to him.

"What do you think of that, Horne?"

"I think, sir, that it must be more than a coincidence; that Mrs. Jacobs must be the wife of the man who was my father's manager."

"Well, I think so, too. I know Jacobs's wife had an impediment in her speech. The odd part of the business is that he should have disappeared at

Limehouse, the very place where one would have thought he would have an objection to turning up at all, connected as it was with his old peculations. I suppose he thought they were forgotten by this time."

"I suppose so."

Dudley still looked very white. He took up the paper again, as if to re-read the paragraph. But Doreen, from her post of vantage on the floor, saw that he held it before him with eyes fixed. Mr. Wedmore, after a little hesitation, and after vainly trying to get another look at the face of the younger man, went on again:

"I thought you would be struck by this; the subject turning up again in this odd way, just when you 've been interesting yourself so much in the old story!"

Down went the paper, and Dudley looked into the face of Mr. Wedmore.

"Interesting myself in it! Have I? How do you mean?"

"Well, you 've asked a good many questions about this Jacobs, and wondered what had become of him. I fancy you have the answer in that paragraph."

There was a pause, and Dudley seemed to recollect something. Then he said:

"Oh, yes, I think I have. The man has fallen upon bad times, evidently. I—I—I 'm sorry for his wife."

"And the man himself—haven't you forgiven him yet?"

Dudley started, and glanced quickly round, as if the simple words had been an accusation.

"Forgiven him? Oh, yes, long ago. At least—" He paused a moment, and then added, inquiringly: "What had I to forgive?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Horne, that 's just what I have often asked myself, when you have insisted upon raking up all the details of poor Jacobs's misdeeds! Why, your poor father, who was ruined by his dishonesty, never showed half the animosity you do. I could have understood it if you had suffered by his frauds. But have you? You have been well educated; you have started well in life. And on the whole, no man who has arrived at your age can honestly say that it would have been better for him to start life with a fortune at his back, eh?"

"No."

Dudley got up from his chair. He seemed agitated and uneasy, and soon took advantage of Mr. Wedmore's suggestion, somewhat dryly made, that he was tired after his journey and would like to go to bed.

When he had left the room, Mr. Wedmore turned angrily to his daughter.

"Now, Doreen, I will have no more of this nonsense. Dudley is beginning all the old tricks over again—absence of mind, indifference to you—did he even look at you as he said good night?—and morbid interest in this old, forgotten business of Jacobs and his misdoings. I won't have any more of it, and I shall tell him plainly that we don't care to have him down here until he can bring a livelier face and manner with him!"

Doreen had risen from her humble seat on the floor and had crawled on her knees to the side of his chair, where she slid a coaxing, caressing hand under his arm and put her pretty head gently down on his shoulder.

"No, you won't, papa dear. You won't do anything of the kind," she whispered in his ear very softly, very humbly. "You would not do anything to give pain to your old friend's son if you could help it, and you would not do anything to hurt your own child, your little Doreen, for a hundred thousand pounds, now would you?"

"Yes, I would, if it was for her good," replied Mr. Wedmore, in a very loud and determined voice, which was supposed to have the effect of frightening her into submission. "And it's all rubbish

to think to get around me by calling yourself 'little Doreen,' when you 're a great, big, overgrown lamp-post of a girl, who can take her own part against the whole county."

Doreen laughed, but still clung persistently to the arm which he pretended to try to release from her clutches.

"Well, I don't know about the county, but I think I can persuade my old father into doing what I want," she purred into his ear with gentle conviction. "You see, papa, it isn't as if Dudley and I were engaged. We—"

"Why, what else have you been but engaged ever since last Christmas?" said her father, irritably. "Everybody has looked upon it as an engagement, and Dudley was devoted enough until a couple of months ago; but now something has gone wrong with the lad, I'm certain, and it would be much better for you both to make an end of this."

"Why, there 's nothing to make an end of," pleaded Doreen. "Just 'let things slide,' as Max says, and let Dudley come down or stay away as he likes, and the matter will come quite right one way or the other, and you will find there was really nothing for you to trouble your dear old head about, after all."

There was really some excellence in the girl's

suggestion; and her father, after much grumbling, gave a half consent to it. He was forced to admit to himself that there was some grounds for Dudley's agitation on reading the paragraph concerning the disappearance of Edward Jacobs, since he had been interesting himself of late in that person's history. But it was the degree of the young man's agitation which had seemed morbid. Mr. Wedmore found it difficult to understand why a mere suggestion of the man's disappearance—if it were indeed *the* man —should affect Dudley so deeply. And the idea of incipient insanity in young Horne grew stronger than ever in Mr. Wedmore's mind.

Now, Doreen was by no means so sanguine as she pretended to be. She was one of those high-spirited, lively girls who find it easy to hide from others any troubles which may be gnawing at their heart. Such a nature has an elasticity which enables it to throw off its cares for a time, when in the society of others, only to brood over them in hours of loneliness.

Nobody in the house knew—what, however, shrewd Queenie half guessed—that Doreen had many an anxious hour, many a secret fit of crying, on account of the change in Dudley's manner toward her. The brilliant, proud-hearted girl was more deeply attached to him than anybody sus-

pected. If any remark was made by outsiders as to the comparative rarity of the young barrister's visits during the past two months, it was always accompanied by the comment that Miss Wedmore would not be long in consoling herself.

And everybody knew that the curate, the Rev. Lisle Lindsay, was hungering to step into Dudley's shoes.

He was not quite to be despised as a rival, this "snowy-banded, dilettant, delicate-handed priest." In the first place, he was a really nice, honorable young fellow, with no much worse faults than a pedantically correct pronounciation of the unaccented vowels; in the second place, he was considerably taller than the race of curates usually runs; and in the third place, he had a handsome allowance from his mother, and "expectations" on a very grand scale indeed. Miss Wedmore, if she were to decide in his favor, might well aspire to be the wife of a bishop some day. And what could woman wish for more?

He was no laggard in love either. On the very morning after the arrival of Max and Dudley, Mr. Lindsay called soon after breakfast to make inquiries about the amount of holly and evergreens which would be available for the decoration of the church, and was shown into the morning-room,

where most of the great work of preparation for Christmas was taking place.

Mrs. Wedmore and all the young people were there, Max and Dudley having been pressed into the service of filling cardboard drums with sweets for what Max called "the everlasting tree." The tree itself stood in a corner of the room, a colossal but lop-sided plant with a lamentable tendency to straggle about the lower branches, and an inclination to run to weedy and unnecessary length about the top.

Max was a hopeless failure as an assistant. He was always possessed with a passionate desire to do something different from what he was asked to do; and when they gave way and indulged his fancy, the fancy disappeared, and he found that he wanted to do something else.

"It 's always the way with a man!" was Queenie's scornful comment on her brother's failing.

Queenie herself looked upon the whole business of the tree as a piece of useless frivolity unworthy the time and attention of grown-up people. And she went about the share in it which she had been persuaded to undertake with a stolid and supercilious manner which went far to spoil the enjoyment of the rest.

Dudley entered into the affair with some zest, but it was noticeable that he devoted himself to

"LOOK HERE, HORNE! DID YOU SEE THIS?"—*See Page* 55.

She went quickly out into the large hall, and the curate followed with alacrity. Max and his mother were engaged in a wrangle over some soup and coal tickets which somebody had mislaid, and in the search for which the whole room, with its parcels and bundles, had to be overturned.

Queenie, who was at work at the end of the room, near the window, uttered a short laugh. Dudley, who was standing a little way off, drew nearer, and asked what she was laughing at.

"Oh, that misguided youth who has just gone out!"

"Misguided?"

"Yes," said Queenie, shortly. "If he hadn't been misguided, he would have devoted his attention to me, not to Doreen. By all the laws of society, curates' wives should be plain. They should also be simple in their dress, and devoted to good works. Doreen says so herself. Why, then, didn't he see that I was the wife for him and not the beauty?"

"Don't you think she will have him, then?" asked Dudley, very stiffly, after a short pause. "She seems to like him. There was no need, surely, for her to have been in such a hurry to take him into the grounds, if she had felt no particular pleasure in his society."

Queenie looked up rather slyly out of her little light eyes. She was distressed on account of her sister's trouble about this apparently vacillating lover, and irritated herself by his strange conduct. But at the bottom of her heart she believed in him and in his affection for Doreen, just as her sister herself did, and she would have given the world to make things right between two people whom she chose to believe intended by nature for each other.

"I think there are other people in the world whose society Doreen likes better," she said at last, below her breath.

The wrangle at the other end of the room was still going on, and nobody heard her but Dudley. He flushed slightly and looked as if he understood. But he instantly turned the talk to another subject.

"Would you have liked that sleek curate yourself, really?"

"Sleek? What do you mean by sleek? You wouldn't have a minister of the church go about with long hair and a velveteen coat and a pipe in his mouth, would you?"

"Not for worlds, I assure you. He is a most beautiful creature, and I admire him very much, though he is perhaps hardly the sort of man I should have expected both you girls to rave about. And as for you, I thought you were too good to rave

about anybody! You are unlike yourself this morning, and more like Doreen."

Queenie laughed again that satirical little laugh which made a man wonder what her thoughts exactly were.

"You say that because you don't know anything about me. I don't talk when Doreen is talking, because then nobody would listen to me. I could talk, too, if anybody ever talked to me."

"But one sees so little of you," pleaded Dudley. "You are generally out district-visiting, or busy for Mrs. Wedmore, so that one hasn't a chance of knowing you well. And one has got an idea that you are too good to waste your time in idle conversation with a mere man!"

"Good!" cried Queenie contemptuously. "There's nothing good about my district-visiting. I like it, Doreen goes about telling people it is good of me. But that's only because she wouldn't care about it herself. I like fussing about and thinking I am making myself useful. It 's like mamma's knitting, which gets her the reputation of being very industrious, while all the time she enjoys it very much."

"But you yourself said you were 'devoted to good works.' I quote your very words."

"That was only in fun. It 's what Doreen says of me. You must have heard her. She is much

better than I am—really much more unselfish—much more amiable. Only because she 's always bright and full of fun, she doesn't get the credit of any of her good qualities. People think she 's only indulging her own inclination when she keeps us all amused and happy all day long. But they don't know that she can suffer just as much as anybody else, and that it costs her an effort to be lively for our sakes when she feels miserable."

Queenie spoke with a little feeling in her usually hard, dry voice. Dudley was silent for a long time when she had finished speaking. At last they looked up at the same moment and met each other's eyes. And the reserved, harassed man felt his heart go out to the girl, with her quiet shrewdness and undemonstrative affection for her brilliant sister.

"Your quiet eyes see a great deal more than one would think, Queenie," he said at last. "I suppose they have seen that there is something—something wrong—with—"

He spoke very slowly, and finally he stopped without finishing the sentence.

Queenie gravely took it up for him.

"Something wrong with you? Of course I have. Well?"

"I don't know why I am telling you this. I didn't

mean to tell any one. But—but—well, I 've begun; I may as well finish. You 're not a person who would talk about anybody else's secrets more than about your own."

"A secret? Are you going to tell me a secret?"

Dudley smiled very faintly, and then his expression suddenly changed. Something like a spasm of fear and of pain shot quickly across his face, frightening her a little. Then he shook his head.

"No," said he. "I hardly think you will consider it a secret, after what you have just told me. I am only going to tell you this: I have had a great trouble, a great affliction, hanging over me for some time now. Sometimes I have thought it was going to clear away and leave me as I was before. Sometimes I have felt myself quite free from it, and able to go on in the old way. But with this consciousness, this knowledge hanging over me always, I have behaved in all sorts of strange ways, have hurt the feelings of my friends, have not been myself at all. You know that, Queenie."

Queenie slowly bowed her head. Mrs. Wedmore and Max, still occupied in their search for the missing soup tickets, had now extended their operations to the hall, and left the room in possession of the other two. Dudley went on with his confession.

"And now something has happened which has cut me off from my old self, as it were. I don't know how else to express what I mean. I came down last night with the intention of speaking to—to Doreen for the last time, of trying to explain myself, if not to—to justify myself to her. You know what I mean, don't you?"

Again Queenie bowed her head. Her father's suspicions as to Dudley's perfect sanity had, of course, reached her ears, and she felt so much pity for the poor fellow whose confession she was then hearing that she dared not even raise her eyes to his face again. He went on, hurrying his words, as if anxious to get his confession over:

"But I thought it all over last night, and I decided to say nothing to her, after all. I don't think I could, without making a fool of myself. For you know—you know my feelings about her; everybody knows. I had hoped— Oh, well, you know what I hoped—"

There was a pause. Dudley was afraid of breaking down.

"Oh, Dudley, is it really all over, then, between you? Oh, it is dreadful! For, you know, she cares, too!"

"Not as I do. I hope and think that is impossible," said Dudley, hoarsely.

There was another pause, a longer one. Then Queenie gave utterance to a little sob. Dudley, who was sitting on the table at which she was at work, got upon his feet with an impatient movement. His dark face looked hard and angry. As he paced once or twice up and down the small space available in the disordered room, the inward fight which was going on between his passion and his sense of right convulsed his face, and Queenie shuddered as, glancing at him, she fancied she could see in the glare of his black eyes the haunting madness at which he seemed so plainly to have hinted.

She rose in her turn.

"But, Dudley—" she began.

And then, unable to express what she felt, what she thought, any better than he had done, she turned abruptly away and sat down again.

There was silence for a few moments, and then she heard the door close. Looking round, she saw that he had left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE STONE PASSAGE.

Queenie kept Dudley's half-confessed secret to herself for the whole of that day. She was hoping against hope that he would change his mind again and speak to Doreen himself. Since there must be a definite and final breach, she thought it would be better for the principals themselves to come to an understanding, without the intervention of outsiders. She would have told him so, but she got no further opportunity of speaking to him alone.

The day passed uncomfortably for everybody, although the only person who gave vent to his feelings by open ill-temper was Mr. Wedmore, who was waiting for the promised explanation which Dudley never attempted to give. And before dinner-time that evening the young barrister returned to town.

Mr. Wedmore, who had been out shooting with Doctor Haselden, was furious, on returning home, to learn of Dudley's departure.

"He has left a note for you, papa, in the study," said Doreen, who was, perhaps, a little paler than usual, but who gave no other outward sign of her feelings.

Her father went into the study, after a glance at his daughter, and read the letter. It was not a very long one. Following the lines of his guarded confession to Queenie, Dudley expressed the sorrow he felt at having to give up the hopes he had had of being something more than the mere old friend he had been for so many years. He had thought it better, at the last, to say this on paper instead of by word of mouth, and he ended by expressing the deep gratitude he should always feel for the kindness shown to him by Mr. Wedmore and all his family during the happiest period of his life.

Mr. Wedmore read this letter with little astonishment. It was, in fact, what he had been prepared to hear. He read it to his wife, who cried a great deal, but acquiesced in her husband's desire that Dudley should drop not only out of the ranks of their intimate friends, but even, as much as possible, out of their conversation.

"Let us do our best," said he, "to make Doreen forget him."

Mr. Wedmore showed the letter also to Doctor Haselden, who, perhaps, from pure love of contra-

diction, persisted in maintaining that the letter confessed nothing, and that the cause of the young man's withdrawal was, in all probability, quite different from what Mr. Wedmore supposed. The two gentlemen had quite a wrangle over the matter, at the end of which each was settled more firmly in his own opinion than before.

When they went upstairs for the night, Doreen came to Queenie's room and demanded to know what her younger sister and Dudley had been talking about so earnestly in the breakfast-room that morning.

"What do you mean by talking earnestly?" said Queenie, in the calm, dry manner which would have made any one but her sister think she was really surprised.

"Max told me," said Doreen, "and I mean to stay here until I know."

It needed very little reflection to tell Queenie that it was better for her sister to hear the truth at once. So she told her.

Doreen listened very quietly, and then got up and wished her sister good night.

"Well," said Queenie, "you take it very quietly. What do you think about it?"

"I'll tell you—when I know myself," answered Doreen, briefly, as she left the room. The first re-

sult oft he talks, however, was a conversation, not with Queenie, but with her brother, Max. Doreen ran after him next morning as he was on his way to the stables and made him take a walk through the park with her instead of going for a ride.

"Max," she said, coaxingly, when they had gone out of sight of the house, "you have been my confidant about this unhappy affair of Dudley's—"

But her brother interrupted her, and tried to draw away the arm she had taken.

"Look here, Doreen," said he earnestly, "you'd better not think any more about him—much better not. I do really think the poor fellow's right in what he hinted to my father, and that he's going off his head; or, rather, I *know* enough to be sure that he's not always perfectly sane. Surely you must see that, in the circumstances, the less you think about him the better."

"There I disagree with you altogether," said Doreen, firmly. "Max, papa and mamma can't understand; they've forgotten how they felt when they were first fond of each other. Queenie's not old enough, and she's too good besides. Now, you do know, you do understand what it is to be head over ears in love."

"Good heavens, Doreen, don't talk like that! You mustn't, you know!"

"Don't talk nonsense," interrupted his sister, sharply. "I tell you I love Dudley, and ever so much more since I've found out he is in great trouble; as any decent woman would do. Now I don't feel nearly so sure as everybody else as to what his trouble is, but I want you to find out, and to help me if you can."

"What, play detective—spy? Not me. It's ridiculous, unheard of. I've done it once on your account, and I never felt such a sneak in my life. I won't do it again, even for you, and that's flat."

And Max thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Won't you?" said Doreen, with a quiet smile. "Then I must, and I will."

Her brother started and stared at her.

"You! *You!* What nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense, as you will find when you hear me get permission to go up to town to stay with Aunt Betty."

Max grew sincerely alarmed.

"Look here, Doreen, be reasonable," said he. "You can do no good to Dudley, believe me. He has got into some dreadful mess or other; but it's nothing that you or I or any earthly creature can help him out of. I confess I didn't tell you all I found out when I went up to town. I couldn't. I can't now. But if you will persist, and if nothing

else will keep you quietly here, I—well, I promise to go up again. And I 'll warrant if I do I shall learn something which will convince even *you* that you must give up every thought of him."

"Will you promise," said Doreen, solemnly, "to tell me all you find out?"

"No," replied Max, promptly, "I won't promise that. I can't. But I think you can trust me to tell you as much as you ought to know."

With this promise Doreen was obliged to be content. And when, at luncheon time, it was discovered that certain things were wanted from town, and Max offered to go up for them, Doreen and her brother exchanged a look from which she gathered that he would not forget her errand.

Max had plenty of time, while he was being jolted from Datton to Cannon Street, to decide on the best means of carrying out his promise. He decided that a visit to Limehouse, to the neighborhood where the property of the late Mr. Horne had been situated, would be better than another visit to Dudley.

Plumtree Wharf was, he knew, the name of the most important part of the property which had belonged to Dudley's father. Putting together the two facts of the discovery of a ticket for Limehouse in Dudley's possession, and of the disappearance of

Edward Jacobs after a visit to that locality on the same day, Max saw that there was something to be gleaned in that neighborhood, if he should have the luck to light upon it.

It was late in the afternoon, and already dark, before he got out of the train at Limehouse station, and began the exploration of the unsavory district which fringes the docks.

Through street after street of dingy, squalid houses he passed; some broken up by dirty little shops, some presenting the dull uniformity of row after row of mean, stunted brick buildings, the broken windows of many of which were mended with brown paper, or else not mended at all. Here and there a grimy public house, each with its group of loafers about the doors, made, with the lights in its windows, a spot of comparative brightness.

Many of the streets were narrow and tortuous, roughly paved, and both difficult and dangerous to traverse by the unaccustomed foot passenger, who found himself now slipping on a piece of orange peel, the pale color of which was disguised by mud, now risking the soundness of his ankles among the uneven and slimy stones of the road.

Max had to ask his way more than once before he reached the Plumtree Wharf, the entrance to which

was through a door in a high wooden fence. Rather to his surprise, he found the door unfastened and unguarded. And when he had got through he looked round and asked himself what on earth he had expected to find there.

There was nothing going on at this late hour, and Max was able to take stock of the place and of the outlook generally. Piles of timber to the right of him, the dead wall at the side of a warehouse on the left, gave him but a narrow space in which to pursue his investigations. And these only amounted to the discovery that the troubled waters of the Thames looked very dark and very cold from this spot; that the opposite bank, with little specks of light, offered a gloomy and depressing prospect, and that the lapping of the water among the black barges which were moored at his feet in a dense mass was the dreariest sound he had ever heard. He turned away with a shudder, and walked quickly up the narrow lane left by the timber, calling himself a fool for his journey.

And just as he was reaching the narrow street by which he had come he was startled to find a girl's face peering down at him from the top of a pile of timber.

Max stopped, with an exclamation. In an instant the girl withdrew the head, which was all he

had seen of her, and he heard her crawling back quickly over the timber, out of his sight.

Although he had seen her for a moment only, Max had been chilled to the bone by the expression of the girl's face. Ghastly white it had looked in the feeble light of a solitary gas lamp some distance away, and wearing an expression of fear and horror such as he had never seen on any countenance before. He felt that he must find out where she had gone, his first belief being that she was a lunatic. Else why should she have disappeared in that stealthy manner, with the look of fear stamped upon her face? There was nothing in the look or manner of Max himself to alarm her; and if she had been in need of help, why had she not called to him?

He got a footing upon the timber and looked over it. But he could see nothing more of the girl. Beyond the stacks were some low-roofed outbuildings and the back of a shut-up warehouse. Reluctantly he got down, and passed into the narrow street. Not willing to leave at once a neighborhood which he had come so far to investigate, he turned, after going some dozen yards down the street, into a narrow passage on his left hand which led back to the river.

The width between the high walls and the ware-

houses on either side was only some five feet. It was flagged with stone, very dark. About ten yards from the entrance there was a small warehouse, on the left hand, on which hung an old board, announcing that the building was "To Let." And next door to this was a dingy shop, with grimy and broken windows, the door of which was boarded up. This shop, also, was "To Be Let," and the board in this case had been up so long that the announcement had to be divined rather than read.

Rather struck by the dilapidated appearance of these two buildings in a place where he supposed land must be valuable, Max paused for an instant. And as he did so, he became aware that there was some one by his side.

Looking down quickly, he saw the young girl of whom he had caught a glimpse a few minutes before.

He started.

She looked up at him, and, still with the same look of stereotyped horror on her thin, white face, whispered, in a hoarse voice, as she pointed to the boarded-up shop-door with a shaking forefinger:

"You daren't go in there, do you? There 's a dead man in there!"

CHAPTER VII.

A QUESTIONABLE GUIDE.

Max started violently at the girl's voice.

"A dead man? In there? How do you know?"

In a hoarse voice the girl answered:

"How do I know? The best way possible. *I saw it done!*"

There was an awful silence. Max was so deeply impressed by the girl's words, her looks, her manner, by the gloom of the cold, dark passage, by the desolate appearance of the two deserted buildings before which they stood, that his first impulse was an overpowering desire to run away. Acting upon it he even took a couple of rapid steps in the direction of the street he had left, passing the girl and getting clear of the uncanny boarded-up front of the shop.

A moan from the girl made him stop and look around at her. Emboldened by this, she came close to him again and whispered:

"You're a man; you ought to have more pluck than I've got. It's two days since it happened—"

"Two days!" muttered Max, remembering that it was two days ago that he had surprised Dudley with his blood-stained hands.

"And for those two days I've been outside here waiting for somebody to come because I daren't go inside by myself. Two days! Two days!" she repeated, her teeth chattering.

Max looked at her with mixed feelings of doubt, pity and astonishment. It was too dark in the ill-lighted passage for him to see all the details of her appearance. She was young, quite young; so much was certain. She looked white and pinched and miserably cold. Her dress was respectable, very plain, and bore marks of her climbing and crawling over the timber an the wharf.

"Won't you go in with me?" she asked again, more eagerly, more tremulously than before. "I can show you the road—round at the back. You will have a little climbing to do, but you won't mind that."

"But what do you want me to do if I do get inside?" said Max. "It's the police you ought to send for, if a man has died in there. Go to the police station and give information."

The girl shook her head.

"I can't do that," she whispered. Then, after a shuddering pause, she came a step nearer and said, in a lower whisper than ever: "He didn't die—of his own accord. He was murdered."

Max grew hot and cold. He heartily wished he had never come.

"All the more reason," he went on in a blustering voice, "why you should inform the police. You had better lose no time about it."

"I can't do that," said the girl, "because he—the man who did it—was kind to us—kind to Granny and me. If I tell the police, they will go after him, and perhaps find him, and—and hang him. Oh, no," and she shook her head again with decision, "I could not do that."

Max was silent for a few moments, looking at her for the first few seconds with pity and then with suspicion.

"Why do you tell all this to me, then—a stranger—if you 're so afraid of the police finding out anything about it?"

The girl did not answer for a moment. She seemed puzzled to answer the question. At last she said:

"I didn't mean to. When I saw you first, at the wharf, at the back there, I just looked at you and hid myself again. And then I thought to myself

that as you were a gentleman perhaps I might dare to ask you what I did."

Max, not unnaturally, grew more doubtful still. This apparently deserted building, which he was asked to enter by the back way, might be a thievish den of the worst possible character, and this girl, innocent as she certainly looked, might be a thieves' decoy. Something in his face or in his manner must have betrayed his thoughts to the shrewd Londoner; for she suddenly drew back, uttering a little cry of horror. Without another word she turned and slunk back along the passage and into the street.

Now, if Max had been a little older, or a little more prudent, if he had indeed been anything but a reckless young rascal with a taste for exciting adventure, he would have taken this opportunity of getting away from such a very questionable neighborhood. But, in the first place, he was struck by the girl's story, which seemed to fit in only too well with what he knew; and in the second place, he was interested in the girl herself, the refinement of whose face and manner, in these dubious surroundings, had impressed him as much as the expression of horror on her face and the agony of cold which had caused her teeth to chatter and her limbs to tremble.

Surely, he thought, the suspicions he had for a moment entertained about her were incorrect- He began to feel that he could not go away without making an effort to ascertain if there were any truth in her story.

He went along the passage and got back to the wharf by the same means as before. Making his way round the pile of timber upon which he had first seen the girl, he discovered a little lane, partly between and partly over the planks, which he promptly followed in the hope of coming in sight of her again.

And, crouching under the wall of a ruinous out-house, in an attitude expressive of the dejection of utter abandonment, was the white-faced girl.

The discovery was enough for Max. All considerations of prudence, of caution, crumbled away under the influence of the intense pity he felt for the forlorn creature.

"Look here," said he, "I'll go in, if you like. Have you got a light?"

"No—o," answered the girl, in a voice which was thick with sobs. "But I can show you where to get one when you get inside."

Max had by this time reached the ground, which was slimy and damp under the eaves; and he pushed his way, with an air of recklessness which

hid some natural trepidation, into the outhouse, the door of which was not even fastened.

"Why," said he, turning to the girl, who was close behind him, "you could have got in yourself easily enough. At least you would have been warmer in here than outside."

His suspicions were starting up again, and they grew stronger as he perceived that she was paying little attention to him, that she seemed to be listening for some expected sound. The place in which they now stood was quite dark, and Max, impatient and somewhat alarmed by the position in which he found himself, struck a match and looked round him.

"Now," said he, "find me a candle, if you can."

Even by the feeble light of the match he could see that he was in a sort of a scullery, which bore traces of recent occupation. A bit of yellow soap, some blacking and a couple of brooms in one corner, a pail and a wooden chair in another, were evidently not "tenant's fixtures."

And then Max noted a strange circumstance—the two small windows were boarded up on the inside.

By the time he had taken note of this, the girl had brought him a candle in a tin candlestick, which she had taken from a shelf by the door.

"That 's the way," she said, in a voice as low as

before, pointing to an inner door. "Through the back room, and into the front one. He lies in there."

Max shuddered.

"I can't say that I particularly want to see him," said he, as he took stock of her in the candle-light, and was struck by the peculiar beauty of her large blue eyes.

He felt a strong reluctance to venturing farther into this very questionable and mysterious dwelling; and he took care to stand where he could see both doors, the one which led farther into the house and the one by which he had entered.

The girl heaved a little sigh, of relief apparently. And she remained standing before him in the same attitude of listening expectancy as he had remarked in her already.

"What are you waiting for—listening for?" asked Max sharply.

"Nothing," she answered with a start. "I 'm nervous, that 's all. Wouldn't you be, if you 'd been waiting two days outside an empty house with a dead man inside it?"

Her tone was sharp and querulous. Max looked at her in bewilderment.

"Empty house!" he repeated. "What were you doing in it, then?"

And he glanced round him, assuring himself afresh by this second scrutiny of the fact that the brick floor and the bare walls of this scullery had been kept scrupulously clean.

The girl's white face, pale with the curious opaque pallor of the Londoner born and bred, flushed a very little. She dropped her eyelids guiltily.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," she said, at last, rather sulkily. "I was living here. Is that enough?"

It was not. And her visitor's looks told her so.

"I was living here with my grandmother," she went on hurriedly, as she saw Max glance at the outer door and take a step toward it. "We 're very poor, and it 's cheaper to live here in a house supposed to be empty than to pay rent."

"But hardly fair to the landlord," suggested Max.

"Oh, Granny doesn't think much of landlords, and, besides, this is part of the property which used to belong to her old master, Mr. Horne—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Max, with new interest.

The girl looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you know about him?" she asked, with eagerness.

"I have heard of him," said Max.

But the astute young Londoner was not to be put off so easily.

"You know something of the whole family, perhaps? Did you know the old gentleman himself?"

"No."

"Do you know—his son?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" She assumed the attitude of an inquisitor immediately. "Perhaps it was he who sent you here to-day?"

"No."

She looked long and scrutinizingly in his face, suspicious in her turn. "Then what made you come?"

Max paused a moment, and then evaded her question very neatly.

"What made me come in here? Why, I came by the invitation of a young lady, who told me she was afraid to go in alone."

The girl drew back a little.

"Yes, so I did. And I am very much obliged to you. I—I wanted to ask you to go into that room, the front room, and to fetch some things of mine—things I have left there. I daren't go in by myself."

Max hesitated. Beside his old suspicions, a new one had just started into his mind.

"Did you," he asked, suddenly, "know of some letters which were written to Mr. Dudley Horne?"

A change came over the girl's face; the expression of deadly terror which he had first seen upon it seemed to be returning gradually. The blue eyes seemed to grow wider, the lines in her cheek and mouth to become deeper. After a short pause, during which he noticed that her breath was coming in labored gasps, she whispered:

"Well, what if I do? Mind, I don't say that I do. But what if I do?"

Her manner had grown fiercely defiant by the time she came to the last word. Max found the desire to escape becoming even stronger than his curiosity. The half-guilty look with which his companion had made her last admission caused a new light to flash into his mind. This "Granny" of whom the girl spoke, and who was alleged to have disappeared, was a woman who had known something of the Horne family. Either she or this girl might have been the writer of the letter Dudley had received while at The Beeches, which had summoned him so hastily back to town. What if this old woman had accomplices—had attempted to rob Dudley? And what if Dudley, in resisting their attempts, had, in self-defence, struck a blow which had caused the death of one of his assailants? Dudley would naturally have been silent on the subject of his visit to this questionable haunt, especially to the brother of Doreen.

"I think," cried Max, as he strode quickly to the door by which he had come in, "that the best thing you can do is to sacrifice your things, whatever they are, and to get out of the place yourself as fast as you can."

As he spoke he lifted the latch and tried to open the door. But although the latch went up, the door remained shut.

Max pulled and shook it, and finally put his knee against the side-post and gave the handle of the latch a terrific tug.

It broke in his hand, but the door remained closed.

He turned round quickly, and saw the girl, with one hand on her hip and with the candle held in the other, leaning against the whitewashed wall, with a smile of amusement on her thin face.

What a face it was! Expressive as no other face he had ever seen, and wearing now a look of what seemed to Max diabolical intelligence and malice. She nodded at him mockingly.

"I can't get out!" thundered he, threateningly, with another thump at the door.

The girl answered in the low voice she always used; by contrast with his menacing tones it seemed lower than ever:

"I don't mean you to—yet. I guessed you'd want to go pretty soon, so I locked the door."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOREWARNED, BUT NOT FOREARMED.

"By Jove!" muttered Max. Then, with a sudden outburst of energy, inspired by indignation at the trap in which he found himself, he dashed across the floor to the zinc pail he had previously noticed, and swinging it round his head, was about to make such an attack upon the door as its old timbers could scarcely have resisted, when the girl suddenly shot between him and the door, placing herself with her back to it and her arms spread out, so quickly that he only missed by a hair's breadth dealing her such a blow as would undoubtedly have split her skull.

In the effort to avoid this, Max, checking himself, staggered and slipped, falling on the brick floor, pail and all.

"Oh, I am sorry! So sorry!"

Again the oddly expressive face had changed completely. Her scarlet lips—those vividly red lips which go with an opaque white skin—were in-

stantly parted with genuine terror. Her eyes looked soft and shining, full of tender feminine kindness and sympathy. Down she went on her knees beside him, asking anxiously :

" Are you hurt? Oh, I know your wrist is hurt !"

Max gave her a glance, the result of which was that he began to feel more afraid of her than of the locked door. About this strange, almost uncannily beautiful child of the riverside slum there was a fascination which appealed to him more and more. The longer he looked at the wide, light-blue eyes, listened to the hoarse but moving voice, the more valiantly he had to struggle against the spell which he felt her to be casting upon him.

" I 've strained my wrist a little, I think. Nothing to matter," said he.

But as he moved he found that the wrist gave him pain. He got up from the floor, and stood with his left hand clasping the injured right wrist, not so eager as before to make his escape.

" Why don't you let me out?" he asked at last, sharply, with an effort.

The girl looked at him with yet a new expression on her mobile face—an expression of desperation.

" Because I couldn't bear it any longer," she whispered. And as she spoke her eyes wandered round the bare walls and rested for a moment on

the inner door. "Because when you've been all alone in the cold, without any food, without any one to speak to for two days and two nights, you feel you must speak to some one, whatever comes of it. If I'd had to wait out there, listening, listening, for another night, I should have been mad, raving mad in the morning."

"But I don't understand it at all," said Max, again inclining to belief in the girl's story, impressed by her passionate earnestness. "Where has your grandmother gone to? Why didn't she take you with her? Can't you tell me the whole story?"

The girl looked at him curiously.

"Just now you only thought of getting away."

"I don't care to be detained by lock and key, certainly," said Max. "But if you will unlock the door, I am quite ready to wait here until you have unburdened your mind, if you want to do that."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"That's a promise, mind," said she at last. "And it's a promise you wouldn't mind giving, I think, if you believed in half I've gone through."

She took a key from her pocket, unlocked the outer door and set it ajar.

"Will that do for you?" asked she.

"Yes, that's all right."

She took up the candle, which she had put on a

"THERE'S A DEAD MAN IN THERE!"—*See Page* 82.

shelf while she knelt to find out whether he was hurt, and crossing the brick floor with rapid, rather stealthy steps, she put her fingers on the latch of the inner door.

"Keep close!" whispered she.

Max obeyed. He kept so close that the girl's soft hair, which was of the ash-fair color so common in English blondes who have been flaxen-headed in their childhood, almost touched his face. She opened the door and entered what was evidently the back room of the deserted shop.

A dark room it must have been, even in broadest daylight. Opposite to the door by which they had entered was one which was glazed in the upper half; this evidently led into the shop itself, although the old red curtain which hung over the glass panes hid the view of what was beyond. There was a little fireplace, in which were the burnt-out ashes of a recent fire. There was a deal table in the middle of the room, and a cloth of a common pattern of blue and red check lay in a heap on the floor. A couple of plain Windsor chairs, and a third with arms and a cushion, a hearth-rug, a fender and fire-irons, completed the furniture of the room.

And the one window, a small one, which looked out upon the wharf, in a corner formed by the out-

house on the one side and a shed on the other, was carefully boarded up.

Grimly desolate the dark, bare rcom looked, small as it was; and a couple of rats, which scurried over the floor as Max entered, added a suggestion of other horrors to the deserted room. The girl had managed to get behind Max, and he turned sharply with a suspicion that she meant to shut him into the room by himself.

"It 's all right—it's all right," whispered she, reassuringly. "He isn't in here. But he 's there."

And she pointed to the door with the red curtain.

Max stopped. The farther he advanced into this mysterious house the less he liked the prospect presented do his view. And the girl herself seemed to have forgotten her pretext of wanting something fetched out of that mysterious third room. She remained leaning against the wall, close by the door by which she and Max had entered, still holding the candlestick and staring at the red curtain with eyes full of terror. Max found his own eyes fascinated by the steady gaze, and he looked in the same direction.

Staring intently at the bit of faded stuff, he was almost ready to imagine, in the silence and gloom of the place, that he saw it move. His breath came fast. Overcome by the uncanny influences

of the dreary place itself, of the hideous story he had heard, of the girl's white face, Max began to feel as if the close, cold air of the unused room was like the touch of clammy fingers on his face.

Even as this consciousness seized upon him, he heard a moan, a sliding sound, a thud, and the light went suddenly out.

In the first impulse of horror at his position Max uttered a sharp exclamation, but remained immovable. Indeed, in the darkness, in this unknown place, to take a step in any direction was impossible. He stood listening, waiting for some sound, some ray of light, to guide him.

All he heard was the scurrying of the rats as they ran, disturbed by the noise, across the room and behind the wainscot in the darkness.

At last he turned and tried to find the door by which he had come in. He found it, and had his hand upon the latch, when his right foot touched something soft, yielding. He opened the door, which was not locked, as he had feared, and was about to make his way as fast as he could into the open air, when another moan, fainter than before, reached his ears.

No light came into the room through the open door; so he struck a wax match. His nerves were not at their best, and it was some time before he

could get a light. When he did so, he discovered that the thing his foot had touched was the body of the girl, lying in a heap on the floor close to the wainscot.

Now Max was divided between his doubts and his pity; but it was not possible that doubt should carry the day in the face of this discovery. Whether she had fainted, or whether this was only a ruse on her part to detain him, to interest him, he could not leave her lying there.

The tin candlestick had rolled away on the floor, and the candle had fallen out of it. The first thing Max had to do was to replace the one in the other, and to get a serviceable light. By the time he had done so he saw a movement in the girl's body. She was lying with her head on the floor. He put his arm under her head to raise it, when she started up, so suddenly as to alarm him, leaned back against the wall, still in her cramped, sitting position, and glared into his face.

"Look here," she said faintly, "I couldn't help it. You know—I think—I 'm almost—starving."

"Heavens! Why didn't I think of it! Poor child! Get up; let me help you. Come to this chair. Wait here, only a few minutes. I 'll get you something to eat and drink."

He was helping her up; had got her on her feet,

indeed, when she suddenly swung round in his arms, clinging to his sleeve and staring again with the fixed, almost vacant look which made him begin to doubt whether her reason had not suffered.

"No, no, no," cried she, gasping for breath; "I can't stay here. I know, I know you wouldn't come back. If you once got out, got outside in the air, you would go back to your home, and I should be left here—alone—with the rats—and—*that!*"

And again she pointed to the curtained door.

Max felt his teeth chattering as he tried to reassure her.

"Come, won't you trust me? I 'll only be a minute. I want to get you some brandy."

"Brandy? No. I dare not."

And she shook her head. But Max persisted.

"Nonsense—you must have it. There 's a public-house at the corner, of course. Come out on to the wharf, if you like and wait for me."

It was pitiful to see the expression of her eyes as she looked in his face without a word. She was leaning back in the wooden arm-chair, one hand lying in her lap, the other hanging limply over the side of the chair. Her hair, which had been fastened in a coil at the back of her head, had been loosened in the fall, and now drooped about her head and face in disorder, which increased her

pathetic beauty. And it was at this point that Max noticed, with astonishment, that her hands, though not specially beautiful or small or in any way remarkable, were not those of a woman used to the roughest work.

She made an attempt to rise, apparently doubting his good faith and afraid to lose sight of him, as he retreated toward the door. But she fell back again, and only stared at him dumbly.

The mute appeal touched Max to the quick. He was always rather susceptible, but it seemed to him that he had never felt, at the hands of any girl, such a variety of emotions as this forlorn creature roused in him with every movement, every look, every word.

He hesitated, came back a step and leaned over the table, looking at her.

"I'll come back," said he, in a voice hardly above a whisper. "Of course I'll come back. You don't think I 'd leave you like this, do you?"

For a moment she stared at him with doubt in her eyes; then, as if reassured, her lips parted in a very faint smile, and she made a slight motion with her head which he was fain to take as a sign of her trust.

He had reached the door, when by a weak gesture she called him back again.

"If—if you should meet anybody—I 'm expecting Granny all the time—I 'm sure she wouldn't leave me altogether like this—you will come back all the same, won't you?"

Her earnestness over this matter had given her back a little strength. She leaned forward over one arm of the chair, impressing her words upon him with a bend of the head.

"Oh, no, I shan't mind Granny," replied Max, confidently.

"Well, you wouldn't mind her if she was in a good humor," went on the girl, doubtfully, "but when she 's in a bad one, oh, well, then," in a lowered voice of deep confidence, "*I 'm afraid of her myself!*"

"That 's all right. It would take more than an old woman to frighten me! Tell me what she 's like and what her name is, and I can present myself to her as a morning caller."

The girl seemed to have recovered altogether from her attack of faintness, since she was able to detain him thus from his proposed errand on her behalf. She smiled again, less faintly than before, and shook her head.

"I don't think there 's much to describe about Granny. She was a housekeeper at old Mr. Horne's house in the city, you know, and she looks just as

old housekeepers always look. Her name's Mrs. Higgs. But," and the girl looked frightened again, "don't tell her you've come to see *me*. She's very particular. At least—I mean—"

A pretty confusion, a touch of hesitancy, the first sign of anything girlish which Max had seen in this strange creature, made her stop and turn her head away. And, the effort of speaking over, she drooped again.

"I won't be long."

And Max, puzzled himself by the feelings he had toward this strange little white-bodied being, went through the outhouse into the open air.

Outside, he found himself staggering, he didn't know why—whether from the emotions he had experienced or from the clammy, close hair of the shut-up room; all he knew was that by the time he reached the public-house, which he had correctly foreseen was to be found at the corner, he felt quite as much in want of the brandy as his patient herself.

It occurred to him, as he stood in the bar, swallowing some fiery liquid of dubious origin which the landlord had sold to him as brandy, to make a casual inquiry about Mrs. Higgs.

"Yes," said the landlord, "I do know a Mrs. Higgs. She comes in here sometimes; she likes her

glass. But they know more about her at The Admiral's Arms, Commercial Road way," and he gave a nod of the head to indicate the direction of that neighborhood.

"Do you know her address?" asked Max.

The landlord smiled.

"It 'ud take a clever head to keep the addresses of all the chance customers as comes in here. For the matter of that, very few of 'em have any addresses in particular; it 's one court one week, and t' other the next."

"But she 's a very respectable woman, the Mrs. Higgs I mean," said Max, tentatively.

"Oh, yes, sir; I've nothin' to say ag'inst her," and the landlord, with a look which showed that he objected to be "pumped," turned to another customer.

Max took the brandy he had bought for the girl and hurried back to the place where he had left her. As he went, an instinct of curiosity, natural enough, considering his recently acquired knowledge, made him go down the passage and try to look in through the grim, dusty window of the shop. But this also was boarded up on the inner side, so that no view could be obtained of what was within.

It seemed to Max, however, as he stood there,

with his eyes fixed on the planks, trying to discover an aperture, that between the cracks of the boards there glimmered a faint light. It seemed to flicker, then it died out.

Surely, he thought, the girl has not summoned enough courage to go into the room by herself?

He hurried back down the passage, and made his way as before to the wharf. Stumbling round the piles of timber, he found the lane by which he had entered and left the house. It seemed to him, though he told himself it must be only fancy, that some of the loose planks had been disturbed since his last journey over them. Reaching the door of outhouse, which he had left ajar, he found it shut.

He was now sure that some one had gone in, or come out, since he left; and for a moment the circumstance seemed to him sufficiently suspicious to make him pause. The next moment, however, the remembrance of the girl's white face, of the pleading blue eyes, returned to him vividly, calling to him, drawing him back by an irresistible spell. He pushed open the door boldly, crossed the brick floor and reëntered the inner room. The candle was still burning on the table, but the girl was not there.

Max looked round the room. He was puzzled, suspicious. As he stood by the table staring at the

wall opposite the fireplace, wondering whether to go out or to explore further, he found his eyes attracted to a spot in the wall-paper where, in the feeble light, something like two glittering beads shone out uncannily in the middle of the pattern. With a curious sensation down his spine, Max took a hasty step back to the door, and the beads moved slowly.

It was a pair of eyes watching him as he moved.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WHO HESITATES.

Max had become accustomed, in the course of this adventurous visit, to surprises and alarms. Every step in the enterprise he had undertaken had brought a fresh excitement, a fresh horror. But nothing that he had so far heard or seen had given him such a sick feeling of indefinable terror as the sight of these two eyes, turning to watch his every movement. For a moment he watched them, then he made a bold dash for the place where he had seen them, and aimed a blow with his fist at the wall.

He heard the loose plaster rattle down ; but when he looked for the result of his blow, he saw nothing but the old-fashioned, dirty paper on the wall, apparently without a hole or tear in it..

The discovery made him feel sick.

He turned to make his escape from the house, to which he felt that he was a fool to have returned at all, when the door by which he had entered opened slowly, and the girl came in.

A little flash, as of pleased surprise, passed over her white face. Then she said, under her breath :

"So you have come back. I didn't think you would. I—I am sorry you did."

Max looked rather blank. The girl's attraction for him had increased during the short period he had been absent from her. He had had time to think over his feelings, to find his interest stimulated by the process. Imagination, which does so much for a woman with a man, and for a man with a woman, had begun to have play. He had come back determined to find out more about the girl, to probe to the bottom of the mystery in which, perhaps, consisted so much of the charm she had for him.

Even now, upon her entrance, the first sight of her face had made his heart leap up.

There was a pause when she finished speaking.

Max, who was usually fluent enough with her sex, hesitated, stammered and at last said:

"You are sorry I came back? Yet you seemed anxious enough to make me promise to come back!"

He observed that a great change had come over her. Instead of being nerveless and lifeless, as he had left her, with dull eyes and weak, helpless limbs, she was now agitated, excited; she glanced nervously about her while he spoke, and tapped the finger-tips of one hand restlessly with those of the other as she listened.

"I know," she replied, rapidly, "I know I was. But—Granny has come back. She came in while you were gone."

Max glanced at the wall, where he had fancied he saw the pair of watching eyes.

"Oh," said he, "that explains what I saw, perhaps. Where is your grandmother?"

"She has gone upstairs to her room under the roof."

"Ah! Are you sure she is upstairs? That she is not in the next room, for instance, watching me through some secret peep-hole of hers?"

The girl stared at him in silence as he pointed to the wall, and as he ran his hand over its surface.

"I saw a pair of eyes watching me just now," he

went on, "from the middle of this wall. I could swear to it!"

The girl looked incredulous, and passed her hand over the wall in her turn. Then she shook her head.

"I can feel nothing," said she. "It must be your fancy. There is no room there. It is the ground-floor of an old warehouse next door which has been to let for years and years—longer than this."

He still looked doubtful, and she added, sharply:

"You can see for yourself if you like."

As she spoke, she was turning to go back into the outhouse, with a sign to him to follow her. But even as she did so, another thought must have struck her, for she shut the door and turned back again.

"No," she said, decisively, "of course you don't want to see anything so much as the outside of this gloomy old house. Don't think me ungrateful; I am not, but"—she came a little nearer to Max, so that she could whisper very close to his ear—"if Granny knew that I'd let a stranger into the place while she was away, I should never hear the last of it; and—and—when she's angry I'm afraid of her."

Max felt a pang of compassion for the girl.

"If you are afraid of her being angry," said he, "you had better let her see me and hear my ex-

planation. I can make things right with her. I have great powers of persuasion—with old ladies—I assure you; and you don't look as if you were equal to a strife of tongues with her or with anybody just now; and I 'd forgotten; I 've brought something for you.

Max took from the pocket of his overcoat the little flat bottle filled with brandy with which he had provided himself; but the girl pushed it away with alarm.

"Don't let Granny see it!" she whispered.

"All right. But I want you to taste it; it will do you good."

She shook her head astutely.

"I am not ill," she said, shortly, "and I don't know that I should take it if I were. I see too much of those things not to be afraid of them. And, now, sir, will you go?" After a short pause she added, in an ominous tone—"while you have the chance."

Max still lingered. He had forgotten his curiosity, he had almost forgotten what had brought him to the house in the first instance. He did not want to leave this girl, with the great, light-blue eyes and the scarlet lips, the modest manner and the moving voice.

When the silence which followed her words had

lasted some seconds, she turned from him impatiently, and leaving him by the door, crossed the little room quickly, opened one of the two wooden doors which stood one on each side of the fireplace, revealing a cupboard with rows of shelves, and took from the bottom a few chips of dry wood, evidently gleaned from the wharf outside, a box of matches and part of a newspaper, and dropping down on her knees on the hearth, began briskly to rake out the ashes and to prepare a fire.

Max stood watching her, divided between prudence, which urged him to go, and inclination, which prompted him to stay.

She went on with her work steadily for some minutes, without so much as a look behind. Yet Max felt that she was aware of his presence, and he knew also, without being sure how the knowledge came to him, that the girl's feeling toward himself had changed now that she was no longer alone in the house with him. The constraint which might have been expected toward a person of the opposite sex in the strange circumstances, which had been so entirely absent from her manner on their first meeting, had now stolen into her attitude toward him.

Yet, although the former absence of this constraint had been a most effective part of her attrac-

tion for him, Max began to think that the new and slight self-consciousness which caused her to affect to ignore him was a fresh charm. Before, while she implored him to come into the house with her, it was to a fellow-creature only that the frightened girl had made her appeal. Now that her grandmother had returned, and she was lonely and unprotected no longer, she remembered that he was a man.

This change in her attitude toward him was strikingly exemplified when, having lit the fire, she rose from her knees, and taking a kettle from the hob, turned toward the door.

"You haven't gone then?" said she.

"No!"

She came forward, taking the lid off the kettle as she walked.

"You won't be advised?"

She was passing him swiftly, with the manner of a busy housewife, when Max, encouraged by her new reserve, and a demure side-look, which was not without coquetry, seized the hand which held the kettle, and asked her if he was to get no thanks for coming to her assistance as he had done.

"I did thank you," said she, not attempting to withdrew her hand, but standing, grave and with downcast eyes, between him and the door.

"Well, in a way, you did. But you didn't thank me enough. You yourself admit it was a bold thing for a stranger to do!"

The girl looked suddenly up into his face, and again he saw in her expressive eyes a look which was altogether new. Like flashes of lightning the changes passed over her small, mobile features, to which the absence of even a tinge of healthy pink color gave, perhaps, an added power of portraying the emotions which might be agitating her. There was now something like defiance in her eyes.

"What was your boldness compared to mine?" said she. "You are a man; you have strong arms, at any rate, I suppose. I am only a girl, and you are a gentleman, and gentlemen are not chivalrous. Who dared the most then, you or I?"

"So gentlemen are not chivalrous?" said Max, ignoring the last part of her speech. "All gentlemen are not, I suppose you mean? Or rather, all the men who ought to be gentlemen?"

"No," answered the girl, stubbornly. "I mean what I said. You with the rest. You 'd act rightly toward a man, I suppose, as a matter of course. You can't act rightly toward a woman, a girl, without expecting to be paid for it."

Max was taken aback. Here was a change, indeed, from the poor, clinging, pleading, imploring

creature of twenty minutes before. He reddened a little and let her hand slip from his grasp.

"I believe you are right," he said, at last, "though you are rather severe. But let me tell you that the word 'chivalry' is misleading altogether. It is applied to those middle-aged Johnnies—no, I mean those Johnnies of the Middle Ages—who were supposed to go about rescuing damsels in distress, isn't it? Well, you don't know what happened after the rescue was effected; but I like to suppose, myself, that the girl didn't just say 'Thanks—awfully' and cut him dead forever afterward."

"You think the knight expected payment, just as you do, for his services?"

"I think so. A very small payment, but one which he would appreciate highly."

The girl leaned against the wall by the door and looked at him with something like contempt for a moment. Then she smiled, not encouragingly, but with mockery in her eyes.

"You have a tariff, I suppose," said she, cuttingly, "a regular scale of charges, as, perhaps, you will say the knights had. Pray, what is your charge in the present instance? A kiss, perhaps, or two?"

Now, Max had, indeed, indulged the hope that she would bestow upon him this small mark of gratitude. It came upon him with a shock of sur-

prise that a girl who had been so bold as to summon him should make so much fuss about the reward he had certainly earned. He had expected to get it with a laugh and a blush, as a matter of course. For his modest suggestion to be taken so seriously was a disconcerting occurrence. He drew himself up a little.

"I don't pretend I should have been generous enough to refuse such a payment if you had shown the slightest willingness to make it," said he. "But as it 's the sort of coin that has no value unless given voluntarily, we will consider the debt settled without it."

He made a pretense of leaving her at this point, without the slightest intention of persisting in it. This curious conference had all the zest of a most novel kind of flirtation, which was none the less piquant for the girl's haughty airs.

There are feminine eyes which allure as much while they seem to repel as they do when they consciously attract; and the light-blue ones which shone in the white face of this East End enchantress were of the number.

Max opened the door and slowly stepped into the outhouse. At the moment of glancing back—an inevitable thing—he saw that she looked sorry, dismayed. He took his gloves out of his pocket and

began to draw them on, to fill up the time. By the time the second finger of the first glove was in its place, for he was deliberate, the girl had come into the outhouse, passed him, and was drawing water from the tap into her kettle. He watched her. She knew it, but pretended not to notice. The circumstance of the water flowing freely in the house which was supposed to be deserted made an excuse for another remark, and a safe one.

"I thought they cut the water off from empty houses; that is, houses supposed to be empty."

She turned round with so much alacrity as to suggest that she was glad of the pretext for re-opening communications. And this time there was a bright look of arch amusement on her face instead of her former expression of outraged dignity.

"So they do. But—the people who know how to live without paying rent know a few other things, too."

Max laughed a little, but he was rather shocked. This pretty and in some respects fastidiously correct young person ought not surely to find amusement in defrauding even a water company.

The fact reminded him of that which the intoxication caused by a pretty face had made him forget—that he was in a house of dubious character, from which he would be wise in escaping without fur-

ther delay. But then, again, it was the very oddness of the contrast between the character of the house and the behavior of the girl which made the piquancy of the situation.

"Oh, yes; of course; I 'd forgotten that," assented Max, limply.

And then he fell into silence, and the girl stood quietly by the tap, which ran slowly, till the kettle was full.

And then it began to run over.

Now this incident was a provocation. Max was artful enough to know that no girl who ever fills a kettle lets it run over unless she is much preoccupied. He chose to think she was preoccupied with him. So he laughed, and she looked quickly round and blushed, and turned her back upon him with ferocity.

He came boldly up to her.

"I 'm so sorry," said he, in a coaxing, confidential, persuasive tone, such as she had given him no proper encouragement to use, "that we 've had a sort of quarrel just at the last, and spoiled the impression of you I wanted to carry away."

He was evidently in no hurry to carry anything away, though he went on with the glove-buttoning with much energy.

She listened, with her eyes down, making, kettle

and all, the prettiest picture possible. There was no light in the outhouse except that which came from a little four-penny brass hand-lamp, which the girl must have lit just before her last entrance into the inner room. It was behind her, on a shelf against the wall; and the light shone through the loose threads of her fair hair, making an aureole round the side view of her little head.

She was bewitching like that, so the susceptible Max thought, while he debated with himself whether he now dared to try again for that small reward. And he reluctantly decided that he did not dare. And again there was something piquant in the fact of his not daring.

The girl, after a short pause, looked up; perhaps, though not so susceptible as he, she was not insensible to the fact that Max was young and handsome, well dressed, a little in love with her, and altogether different from the types of male humanity most common to Limehouse.

"If," she suggested at last, with some hesitation, "you really think it better to see my grandmother, she will be down very soon. I 'm going to make some tea; and you could wait, if you liked, in the next room."

"I should be delighted," said Max.

Off came the gloves; and as the girl tripped

quickly into the adjoining room, he followed with alacrity.

"Mind," cried she suddenly, as she turned from the fireplace and stood by the table in an attitude of warning, "it is at your own risk, you know, that you stay. You can guess that the people who belong to a hole-and-corner place like this are not the sort you 're accustomed to meet at West-End dinner tables, nor yet at an archbishop's garden-party. But as you 've stayed so long, it will be better for me if you stay till you have seen Granny, as she must have heard me talking to you by this time."

Now Max, in the interest of his conversation with the girl, had forgotten all about less pleasant subjects. Now that they were suddenly recalled to his mind, he felt uneasy at the idea of the unseen but ever-watchful "Granny," who might be listening to every word he uttered, noting every glance he threw at the girl.

And then the natural suspicion flashed into his mind: Was there a "Granny" after all? or was the invisible one some person more to be dreaded than any old woman?

Another glance at the girl, and the fascinated, bewildered Max resolved to risk everything for a little more of her society.

CHAPTER X.

GRANNY.

There was some constraint upon them both at first; and Max had had time to feel a momentary regret that he had been foolish enough to stay, when he was surprised to find the girl's eyes staring fixedly at a small parcel which he had taken from his coat-tail pocket and placed upon the table.

It was a paper of biscuits which he had brought from the public-house. He had forgotten them till that moment.

"I brought these for you—" he began.

And then, before he could add more, he was shocked by the avidity with which she almost snatched them from his hand.

"I—I 'd forgotten!" stammered he.

It was an awful sight. The girl was hungry, ravenously hungry, and he had been chatting to her and talking about kisses when she was starving!

There was again a faint spot of color in her

cheeks, as she turned her back to him and crouched on the hearth with the food,

"Don't look at me," she said, half laughlng, half ashamed. "I suppose you 've never been without food for two days!"

Max could not at first answer. He sat in one of the wooden chairs, with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped, calling himself, mentally, all sorts of things for his idiotic forgetfulness.

"And to think," said he, at last, in a hoarse and not over-steady-voice, "that I dared to compare myself to a knight-errant!"

The biscuits were disappearing rapidly. Presently she turned and let him see her face again.

"Perhaps," suggested she, still with her mouth full, "as you say, one didn't hear quite all about those gentlemen. Perhaps they forgot things sometimes. And perhaps," she added, with a most gracious change to gratitude and kindness, "they weren't half so sorry when they forgot as you are."

Max listened in fresh amazement. Where on earth had this child of the slums, in the cheap-stuff frock and clumsy shoes, got her education, her refinement? Her talk was not so very different from that of the West-End dinner-tables she had laughed at. What did it mean?

"Do you really feel so grateful for the little I have done?" he asked suddenly.

The girl drew a long breath.

"I don't dare to tell you *how* grateful."

"Well, then, will you tell me all about yourself? I 'm getting more puzzled every moment. I hope it isn't rude to say so, but—you and this place don't *fit*."

For a moment the girl did not answer. Then she put the paper which had held the biscuits carefully into the cupboard by the fireplace, and as she did so he saw her raise her shoulders with an involuntary and expressive shrug.

"I suppose it is rather surprising," she said at last, as she folded her hands in her lap and kept her eyes fixed upon the red heart of the fire. "It surprises me sometimes."

There was a pause, but Max would not interrupt her, for he thought from her manner that an explanation of some sort was coming. At last she went on, raising her head a little, but without looking at him :

"And very likely it will astonish you still more to hear that in coming to this place I made a change for the better."

Max was too much surprised to make any comment.

"If you want to know my name, date of birth, parentage and the rest of it," went on the girl, in a tone of half-playful recklessness, "why, I have no details to give you. I don't know anything about myself, and nobody I know seems to know any more. Granny says she does, but I don't believe her."

She paused.

"Why, surely," began Max, "your own grandmother—"

"But I don't even know that she is my own grandmother," interrupted the girl, sharply. "If she were, wouldn't she know my name?"

"That seems probable, certainly."

"Well, she doesn't, or she says she doesn't. She pretends she has forgotten, or puts me off when I ask questions, though any one can understand my asking them."

This was puzzling, certainly. Max had no satisfactory explanation to offer, so he shook his head and tried to look wise. As long as she would go on talking, and about herself, too, he didn't care what she said.

"What does she call you?" asked he, after a silence.

"Carrie—Carrie Rivers. But the 'Rivers' is not my name, I know. It was given me by Miss Al-

dridge, who brought me up, and she told me it wasn't my real name, but that she gave it to me because it was 'proper to have one.' So how can I believe Granny when she says that it is not my name? Or at least that she has forgotten whether I had any other? If she had really forgotten all that, wouldn't she have forgotten my existence altogether, and not have taken the trouble to hunt me out, and to take me away from the place where she found me?"

"Where was that?" asked Max.

The girl hung her head, and answered in a lower voice, as if her reply were a distasteful, discreditable admission:

"I was bookkeeper at a hotel—a wretched place, where I was miserable, very miserable."

Max was more puzzled than ever.

Every fresh detail about herself and her life made him wonder the more why she was refined, educated. Presently she looked up, and caught the expression on his face.

"That was after Miss Aldridge died," she said, with a sigh. "I had lived with her ever since I was a little girl. I can hardly remember anything before that—except—some things, little things, which I would rather forget." And her face clouded again. "She was a very old lady, who had

been rich once, and poor after that. She had kept a school before she had me; and after that, I was the school. I had to do all the learning of a schoolful. Do you see?"

"Ah," said Max, "*now* I understand! And didn't she ever let you know who placed you with her?"

"She said it was my grandmother," answered Carrie, doubtfully.

"This grandmother? The one you call Granny?"

"I don't know. You see, Mrs. Higgs never turned up till about ten months ago, long after Miss Aldridge had died. She died the Christmas before last."

"And how did you get to the hotel?"

"I had to do something. Miss Aldridge had only her annuity. I had done everything for her, except the very hardest work, that she wouldn't let me do; and when she died, suddenly, I had to find some way of living. And somebody knew of the hotel. So I went."

"Where was it?"

"Oh, not so very far from here. It was a dreadful place. They treated me fairly well because I am quick at accounts, so I was useful. But, oh, it wasn't a place for a girl at all."

"But why didn't you get a better one? Anything would have been better, surely, than coming here, to live like this!"

Max was earnest, impassioned even. The girl smiled mournfully as she just caught his eyes for a moment, and then looked at the fire again.

"You don't understand," she said, simply. "How should you? I should have had no reference to give if I had wanted another situation. The name of the place where I had been living would have been worse than none."

"But there are lots of places where you could have gone, religious and philanthropic institutions I think they call themselves, where they would have listened to what you had to say, and done their best to help you."

Carrie looked dubious.

"Are there?" said she. "Well, there may be, of course. But I think not. Plenty of institutions of one sort and another there are, of course. But those for women are generally for one class—a class I don't belong to."

Max shuddered. This matter-of-fact tone jarred upon him. It was not immodest, but it revealed a mind accustomed to view the facts of life, not one nourished on pretty fancies, like those of his sisters.

"And even if," she went on, "there were a home, an institution, a girl like me could go to and obtain employment, it wouldn't be a life one would care

for; it would be a sort of workhouse at the best, wouldn't it?"

"Wouldn't it be better than—this?"

"I don't even know that. Granny's fond of me in her way. That's the one thing no sort of institution can give you, the feeling that you belong to some one, that you're not just a number."

"Well, but you're well educated—and—"

He was going to say "pretty," but her look stopped him.

It was almost a look of reproach.

"Do you think I'm the only fairly-educated girl in London who doesn't know how to get a living? Haven't you ever found, in poor, wretched little shops, girls who speak well, look different from the others? Don't you know that there are lots of girls like me who are provided for, well provided for at the outset, and then forgotten, or neglected, and left to starve, to drift, to get on the best way they can? Oh, surely you must know that! Only people like you don't care to think about these things. And you are quite right, quite right. Why should you?"

Suddenly the girl sprang up and made a gesture with her hands as if to dismiss the subject. Max, watching her with eager interest, saw pass quickly over her face a look which set him wondering on

whose countenance he had seen it before. In an instant it was gone, leaving a look of weariness behind. But it set him wondering. Who was she? Who were the mysterious parents of whom she knew nothing?

Carrie glanced at the door which led into the outhouse. The tapping of a stick on the stone-flagged floor announced the approach of "Granny" at last. The girl ran to open the door.

Max had sprung up from his chair, full of curiosity to see the old lady of whom Carrie seemed to be somewhat in awe.

He was rather disappointed. There was nothing at all formidable or dignified about Mrs. Higgs, who was a round-shouldered, infirm old woman in a brown dress, a black-and-white check shawl, and a rusty black bonnet.

She stopped short on seeing Max, and proceeded, still standing in the doorway, to scrutinize with candid interest every detail of his appearance. When she had satisfied herself, she waved her stick as an intimation to him that he could sit down again, and, leaning on the arm of the young girl, crossed the room, still without a word, and took her seat in the one arm-chair.

As Carrie had said, there was nothing singular or marked about her face or figure by which one could

have distinguished her from the general run of old women of her modest but apparently respectable class. A little thin, whitish hair, parted in the middle, showed under her bonnet; her eyes, of the faded no-color of the old, stared unintelligently out of her hard, wrinkled face; her long, straight, hairy chin, rather hooked nose and thin-lipped mouth made an *ensemble* which suggested a harmless, tedious old lady who could "nag" when she was not pleased.

Conversation was not her strong point, evidently, or, perhaps, the presence of a stranger made her shy. For, to all Carrie's remarks and inquiries, she vouchsafed only nods in reply, or the shortest of answers in a gruff voice and an ungracious tone.

"Who is he?" she asked at last, when she had begun to sip her cup of tea.

She did not even condescend to look at Max as she made the inquiry.

"A gentleman, Granny—the gentleman I told you of, who came in with me because I was afraid to come in by myself."

"But what 's he doing here now? You 're not by yourself now."

Max himself could hardly help laughing at this question and comment.

"I thought I ought to explain to you my appearance here," said he, modestly.

"Very well, then; you can go as soon as you like."

"Granny!" protested the girl in a whisper; "don't be rude to him, Granny. He's been very kind."

"Kind! I dare say!"

Max thought it was time to go, and he rose and stood ready to make a little speech. At that moment there was a noise in the outhouse, and both Mrs. Higgs and Carrie seemed suddenly to lose their interest in him, and to direct their attention to the door.

Then Mrs. Higgs made a sign to Carrie, who went out of the room and into the outhouse. As Max turned to watch her, the light went out.

By this time Carrie had shut the door behind her, and Max was, as he supposed, alone with the old woman. He was startled, and he made an attempt to find the door leading into the outhouse and to follow the girl; but this was not so easy.

While he was fumbling for the door, he found himself suddenly seized in a strong grip, and, taken unawares, he was unable to cope with an assailant so dexterous, so rapid in his movements, that, before Max had time to do more than realize that

he was attacked, he was forced through an open doorway and flung violently to the ground.

Then a door was slammed, and there was silence.

As Max scrambled to his feet his hand touched something clammy and cold.

It was a hand—a dead hand.

Max uttered a cry of horror. He remembered all that he had forgotten. He knew now that the girl's story was true, and that he was shut in the front room with the body of the murdered man.

CHAPTER XI.

A TRAP.

Max tried to find the door by which he had been thrown into the room. The upper portion was of glass, he supposed, remembering the red curtain which hung on the other side of it. But although he felt with his hands in the place where he supposed the door to be, he found nothing but wooden shelves, such as are usually found lining the walls of shops, and planks of rough wood.

He paused, looked around him, hoping that when his eyes got used to the darkness some faint ray of light coming either through the boarded-up front or through the glass upper half of the door, would

enable him to take his bearings, or, at any rate, to help him avoid that uncanny "something" in the middle of the floor.

But the blackness was absolute. Strain his eyes as he might, there was no glimmer of light in any direction to guide him, and he had used up his last match. So he went to work again with his hands. These rough planks were placed perpendicularly against the wall to a width of about three feet—the width of the door. Passing his fingers slowly all round them, he ascertained that they reached to the floor, and to a height of about seven feet above it. Evidently, thought he, it was the door itself which opened into the shop which had been carefully boarded up. As soon as he felt sure of this, he dealt at the planks a tremendous blow with his fist. He hurt his hand, but did no apparent injury to the door, which scarcely shook. Then he tried to tear one of the boards away from the framework to which it was attached, but without result. The nails which had been used to fasten it were of the strongest make, and had been well driven in.

Foiled in his attempt to get out of the room by the way he had come, Max moved slowly to the left, and at the distance of only a couple of feet from the door found the angle of the wall, and began to

creep along, still feeling with hands and feet most carefully, in the direction of the front of the shop.

This side of the room presented no obstacles. The wall-paper was torn here and there; the plaster fell down in some places at his touch. A board shook a little under his tread when he had taken a few paces, but at the next step he made the floor seemed firm enough.

On turning the next angle in the wall he came to the shop door—the one leading into the stone passage outside. Here he made another attempt to force an exit, but it was boarded up as securely as the inner one, and the window, which was beside it, was in the same condition.

It by no means increased the confidence of Max as to his own safety to observe what elaborate precautions had been used by the occupants of the house to secure themselves from observation. He could no longer doubt that he was in a house which was the resort of persons of the worst possible character, and in a position of the gravest danger.

While opposite the window, he listened eagerly for some sound in the passage outside. If a foot-passenger should pass, he would risk everything and shout for help with all the force of his lungs.

Even while he indulged this hope, he felt that it was a vain one. It was now late; traffic on the

river had almost ceased; there was no attraction for idlers on the landing-stage in the cold and the darkness.

He continued his investigations.

At the next angle in the wall he came to more shelves, decayed, broken, left by the last tenant as not worth carrying away. And presently his feet came upon something harder, colder than the boards; it was a hearthstone, and it marked the place where, before the room was turned into a shop, there had been a small fireplace. And on the other side of this, near the wall, was a collection of rubbish, over the musty items of which Max stumbled as he went. Old boxes, bits of carpet, broken bricks; every sort of worthless lumber.

And so, without accident, without incident, without hearing a sound but the faint noise of his own movements, Max got back to the point where he had started.

Then he paused and listened at the inner door.

In spite of everything, he refused to yield to the suggestion that Carrie had anything to do with his incarceration. Would she not, on finding that he had disappeared, make an effort to get him out?

While he was standing between doubt and hope, on the alert for any sound on the other side which should suggest the presence of the girl herself and

give him the cue to knock at the door again, his attention was attracted by a slight noise which thrilled him to the marrow; for it came, not from outside, but from some part of the room itself, in which he had supposed himself to be alone with the dead body of a man.

Instantly he put his back to the door and prepared to stand on the defensive against the expected attack of an invisible assailant.

That was the awful part of it, that he could not see. For a moment he thought of creeping back to the rubbish heap in the corner and trying to find, amongst the odds and ends lying there, some sort of weapon of defense. But a moment's reflection told him that the act of stooping, of searching, would put him more at the mercy of an assailant than ever. There was absolutely nothing to do but to wait and to listen.

And the noise he heard was like the drawing of a log of wood slowly along the floor. This was followed by a dull sound, like the falling of a log to the earth.

And then there followed two sounds which made his flesh creep: The first was the creaking and cracking of wooden boards, and the second was a slow, sliding noise, which lasted, intermittently, for what seemed an hour.

When the latter noise ceased something fell heavily to the ground. That was a sound there was no mistaking, and then the creaking went on for what seemed a long time, and ceased suddenly in its turn.

And then, again, there was dead silence, dead stillness.

By this time Max was as cold as ice, and wet from head to foot with the sweat of a sick terror. What the sounds meant, whence they proceeded, he could not tell, but the horror they produced in him was unspeakable, never to be forgotten.

He did not move for a long time after the sounds had ceased. He wanted to shout, to batter with his fists on the doors, the window. But a hideous paralysis of fear seemed to have taken possession of him and benumbed his limbs and his tongue.

Max was no coward. He was a daring rider, handy with his fists, a young man full of spirit and courage to the verge of recklessness, as this adventure had proved. But courage must have something to attack, or at least to resist, before it can make itself manifest; and in this sickening waiting, listening, watching, without the use of one's eyes, there was something which smacked of the supernatural, something to damp the spirits of the bravest man.

There was nothing to be gained, there was, perhaps, much to be risked, by a movement, a step. So Max felt, showing thereby that he possessed an instinct of sane prudence which was, in the circumstances, better than bravery.

And presently he discerned a little patch of faint light on the floor, which gradually increased in size until he was able to make out that it was thrown from above, and from the corner above the rubbish heap.

Max kept quite still. The relief he felt was exquisite. If once he could have a chance of seeing the man who was in the room with him, and who he could not doubt was the person who had thrown him in, Max felt he should be all right. In a tussle with another man he knew that he could hold his own, and a sight of the ruffian would enable him to judge whether bribery or force would be the better weapon with him.

In the meantime he watched the light with anxious eyes, determined not to move and risk its extinction until he had been able to examine every corner of the little shop.

And as he looked, his eyes grew round, and his breath came fast.

There was no counter left, no furniture at all behind which a man could hide. And the room, ex-

cept for the rubbish in the corner, a small, straggling heap, was absolutely bare.

There was no other creature in it, dead or alive, but himself.

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPE.

An exclamation, impossible to repress, burst from the lips of Max.

At the same moment he made a spring to the left, which brought him under the spot in the floor above through which the light was streaming.

And he saw through a raised trap-door in the flooring above the shrewish face of old Mrs. Higgs, and the very same candle in the very same tin candlestick that he had seen in use in the adjoining room.

The old woman and the young man stared at each other for a moment in silence. It seemed to Max that there was genuine surprise on her face as she looked at him.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed she, as she lowered the candle through the hole, and looked, not only at

him, but into every corner of the shop. "Well, I never! How did you get in there, eh?"

Max was angry and sullen. How could he doubt that she knew more about it than he did! On the other hand, he was not in a position to be as rude as he felt inclined to be.

"You know all about that, I expect," said he, shortly.

"I? How should I know anything about it? I only know that I lost sight of you very quickly, and couldn't make out where you'd got to."

"Well, you know now," said Max, shortly, "and perhaps you'll be kind enough to let me out."

In spite of himself his voice shook. As the old woman still hesitated, he measured with his eye the distance between the floor where he stood and the open trap-door above. It was too far for a spring. Mrs. Higgs seemed to divine his thoughts, and she laughed grimly.

"All right," said she. "All right. I'll come down. I wonder who can have put you in there now! It's one of those young rascals from over the way, I expect. They are always up to something. Don't you worry yourself; I'm coming!"

Her tone had become so reassuring that Max began to wonder whether the old woman might not be more innocent of the trick which had been

played upon him than he had supposed. This impression increased when Mrs. Higgs went on:

"Why didn't you holloa out when you found yourself inside?"

"It wouldn't have been of much use," retorted Max. "I thumped on the door and made noise enough to wake the city."

"Well, I thought I heard a knock, some time ago," said Mrs. Higgs, who seemed still in no hurry to fulfill her promise of coming down. "But I thought it was nothing of any consequence, as I didn't hear it again."

"Where were you then?" To himself he added: "You old fool!"

"Eh?" said Mrs. Higgs.

Max repeated the question.

"Well, first I was downstairs, and then I came up here."

At last Max saw in the old woman's lackluster eyes a spark of malice.

"You're coming to open the door now?" asked he.

"All right," said she.

Down went the trap-door, and the light and the old woman disappeared together. Max wished he had asked for a candle, although he doubted whether his request would have been complied with.

And at the end of another five minutes, which seemed like hours, he began to have other and graver doubts. He had gone back to his former place near the door, and he stood waiting, with more and more eagerness, more and more anxiety, for the promised appearance of Mrs. Higgs.

Surely, slow as her steps might be, she could have got down by this time.

He grew restless, uneasy. The old suspicions—which her appearance and the artful simplicity of her manner had allayed—rose up in his mind with fresh vigor. And, to add to his anxiety, he suddenly remembered the pretext Carrie had given to try to get him into the front room.

She had told him there were things of hers in there which she wanted. He had believed her, at least, implicitly. But now he knew that her pretext was a lie. She also, therefore, had been an accomplice in the plot to get him into this room.

As this thought came into his mind, he heard again the creaking of the boards, and this time it was accompanied by another sound, faint, intermittent, but unmistakable—the sound of the splashing of water close to his feet.

Turning quickly to the door, he raised his fist and brought it upon the boards with a sounding crash; at the same time he shouted for "Help!"

with all the strength of his lungs. He repeated the blow, the cry,

Again he heard, when he paused to listen, the faint splashing of the water, the creaking of the boards behind him. Then, just as he raised his hand for one more blow on the door, he felt it open a very little, pushing him back.

And at the same moment a voice whispered :

"'Sh–sh !"

Very gradually the door was opened a little farther. A hand caught the sleeve of his coat. It was quite dark outside the door—as dark as in the front room.

"'Sh–sh !" was whispersd again in his ear, as he felt himself drawn through the narrow aperture.

He made no attempt to resist, for he knew, he felt, that the hand was Carrie's, and that this was rescue.

When he had passed into the second room, Max was stopped by a warning pressure of the hand upon his arm, and then he felt the touch of Carrie's lips upon his ear, so close did she come before she uttered these words:

"Don't make a sound. Come slowly, very quietly, very carefully. You 're all right."

He heard her close the door through which he had just come, and then he let her lead him, in

silence and in the darkness, until they reached another door. This she opened with the same caution, and Max, passing through with her, found himself, as he knew by the little step down onto the brick floor, in the outhouse.

"Who 's that?" said a man's voice, startling Max, and confirming in an instant the suspicions he had had that the outrage to which he had been subjected was the work of a gang.

"It 's me—Carrie," said the girl.

And opening the outer door, she drove Max out with a gentle push, and closed it between herself and him.

"Thank God!" was his first muttered exclamation, as he felt the welcome rush of cold night air and felt himself free again.

But the very next moment he turned back instinctively to the door and attempted to push it open. The latch was gone; he had broken it himself. But the door was now locked against him.

Of course, this circumstance greatly increased the desire he had for one more interview, however short, with Carrie. He wanted to understand her position. Too much interested in the girl to wish to doubt her, grateful to her for contriving his escape, Max yet found it difficult to reconcile her

actions with the honesty her words had caused him to believe in.

However, finding that the door was inexorably closed upon him, he saw that there was nothing for it but to take himself off into safer if less interesting regions as quickly as possible. So he got out on the wharf, through and over the timber, and was on the point of crossing to the door in the fence, when he saw a man come quickly through, lock the door behind him and make his way through the piles of timber with the easy, stealthy step of a man accustomed to do this sort of thing, and to do it at night.

Before the man got near him, Max, who had stepped back a little under the wall of one of the outhouses, was sure that the newcomer was of doubtful character. When the latter got out into the light thrown by the street-lamp outside the wharf, this impression was confirmed.

A little man, young, of slight and active build, with a fair mustache, blue eyes and curly, light hair, he was undoubtedly good-looking, although there was something mean and sinister about the expression of his face. Max could scarcely see all these details; but, as it was, he made out enough for him to experience an idiotic pang of something like jealousy, as he made up his mind on the instant

that the object of the young man's visit was to see Carrie.

The visitor wore a light overcoat, and had a certain look of being well off, or, at least, well dressed.

And, suspicion getting the upper hand again, the thought darted through the mind of Max that it was strange to find so many persons—this was the third of whom he had knowledge—hovering about the shut-up house, when Carrie had represented herself to have been alone for two whole days.

Against his better judgment, Max followed the newcomer, step by step, at a safe distance, and raised himself on the timber in such a way as to be able to watch what followed.

The man in the light coat made his way with surprising neatness and celerity over the timber to the door of the outhouse, at which he gave two short knocks, a pause, and then two more.

After waiting for a few moments, the man repeated this signal, more loudly than before.

And then the door opened, and Max heard the voice of Carrie, though it was too dark for him to see her at that distance.

"You, Dick? Come in."

And the young man, without answering, availed himself of the invitation; and the door was shut.

Max stared down at the closed door in perplexity and dismay. In spite of all his adventures in that very doubtful house, or, perhaps, because of them, his interest in Carrie, of the blue eyes and the wonderful voice, was as strong as ever. Hovering between trust and mistrust, he told himself at this point that she was nothing in the world but the thieves' decoy he had at first suspected. But in that case, why had he himself not been robbed? He wore a valuable watch ; he had gold and notes in his purse. And no attempt had been made to relieve him of either the one or the other.

And the foolish fellow began to consider and to weigh one thing with the other, and to become more and more eager to see the girl again if it were only to upbraid her for her deceit, until he ended by slipping down to the ground, going boldly to the door of the outhouse, and giving two knocks, a pause, and two knocks more.

As he had expected, Carrie herself, after an interval of only a few seconds, opened the door.

There was a little light in the outhouse, and none outside ; and Max, having taken a couple of steps to the left, she at first saw nobody. So she made a step forward. Max instantly put himself between her and the door.

On recognizing him, Carrie started, but uttered no sound, no word.

"I want to speak to you," said Max, in a low voice.

But all her boldness of their first interview, her coquetry of the second, her quiet caution of the third had disappeared. She was now frightened, shy, anxious to get away.

"Oh, why did you come back? Why did you come back? Go away at once and never come here again. Haven't you got a lesson?"

Her voice broke; her anxiety was visible. Max was touched, more interested than ever.

"I can't go away," he whispered back, "until I have spoken to you about something which is very serious. Can't you come out on the wharf, somewhere where we can talk without anybody overhearing?"

"Oh, no, oh, no. I must go in. And you must go. Are you a *fool*," and she stamped her foot with sudden impatience, "to be so persistent?"

"A fool?" echoed Max, half to himself. "By Jove, I think I am. Look here," and he bent down so that he might whisper very close to her ear; "I must set the police on this place, you know; but I want you to get away out of it first."

She listened in silence. She waited for him to

say more. But he was waiting on his side for the protests he expected. At last she laughed to herself derisively.

"All right," said she. "Set the police on us by all means. Oh, do—do! But—just mention first to your friend, Mr. Horne, that that 's what you 're going to do. Just mention it to him, and see the thanks you 'll get for your trouble!"

These words came upon Max with a great shock. In the excitement of his own adventures in this place, he had quite forgotten his friend, Dudley Horne, and the errand which had first brought him into the neighborhood. He had forgotten, also, what he had from the first only half believed—the girl's words connecting Dudley with a murder committed within those walls.

Now that the remembrance was thus abruptly brought back to him, he felt as if he wanted to gasp for breath. Carrie watched him, and presently made a sign to him to follow her. Scrambling out to the open space on the wharf, she made for the spot close to the water where Max had stood to watch the man whom Carrie had called "Dick."

When Max came up to her, the girl was standing close under the eaves of the outhouse on the bank, leaning against the wall. He could scarcely see anything of her face in the darkness, but he was

struck by something strangely moving in the tones of her voice as she broke the silence.

"Look here," she said, "I want you to make me a promise. Come, it ought not to be difficult; for I got you out of a nice mess; remember that. You've got to give me your word that you will say nothing about your adventures to-day, either to the police or to anybody else."

"I can't promise that. And why on earth do you want me to do so? Surely you can have no real sympathy with the people who do the things that are done in there—"

Carrie interrupted him, breaking in upon him abruptly:

"What things?"

"Murders, and—"

"The murder was done by your friend, not by us."

"'Us?' Surely you don't identify yourself with these people?"

"I do. They are my friends—the only friends I have."

"But they are thieves, blackmailers!" said Max, saying not what he knew but what he guessed.

"What have they stolen from you? What harm have they done to you or anybody that you know of? All this is because my Granny didn't approve

of my having a stranger in, and had you shut into a dark room to give you a fright."

"But you forget you said just now you had got me out of a nice mess."

"I—I meant that you were frightened."

"And with good reason. After what I saw and heard in that room, I should be worse than a criminal myself if I didn't inform the police about the existence of the place. I believe it's one of the vilest dens in London."

Carrie was silent. She did not attempt to ask him what it was that he had heard and seen while in that room. And Max felt his heart sink within him. He would have had her question, protest, deny. And instead she seemed tacitly to take the truth of all his accusations for granted.

"Don't you see," he presently went on, almost in a coaxing tone, "that it's for your own good that you should have to go away? I won't believe—I can't—that you like this underground, hole-and-corner existence, this life that is dishonest all through. Come, now, confess that you don't like it—that you only live like this because you can't help it, or because you think you can't help it—and I'll forgive you."

There was a long pause. Then he heard a little, hard, cynical laugh. He tried hard to see her face;

but although he caught now and then a gleam of the great eyes, the wonderful eyes that had fascinated him, he could not distinguish the expression, hardly even the outline of her features.

When she at last spoke, it was in a reckless, willful tone.

"Forgive me! What have you to forgive, except that I was fool enough to ask you into the house? And if you've suffered for that, it seems I shall have to, too, in the long run; and I'm not going to say I don't like the life, for I like it better than any I've lived before."

"What!"

"Yes, yes, I tell you. I'm not a heroine, ready to drudge away my life in any round of dull work that'll keep body and soul together. I'd rather have the excitement of living what you call a hole-and-corner life than spend my days stitch—stitch—stitching—dust—dust—dusting, as I used to have to do with Miss Aldridge, as I should have to do if I went away from here."

"Well, but there are other things you could do," pleaded Max, with vague thoughts of setting his own sisters to work to find this erratic child of the riverside some more seemly mode of life than her present one.

"What other things?"

"Why, you could—you could teach in a school or in a family."

"No, I couldn't. I don't know enough. And I wouldn't like it, either. And I should have to leave Granny, who wants me, and is fond of me—"

"And Dick!" burst out Max, spitefully. "You would have to give up the society of Dick."

It was possible, even in the darkness, to perceive that this remark startled Carrie. She said, in astonishment which she could not hide:

"And what do you know about Dick?"

"I know that you wouldn't care for a life that is repugnant to every notion of decency, if it were not for Dick," retorted Max, with rash warmth.

Carrie laughed again.

"I'm afraid you got your information from the wrong quarter," said she, quietly. "Not from Dick himself, that's certain."

There was some relief to Max in this confident assertion, but not much. Judging Dick by his own feelings, he was sure that person had not reached the stage of intimacy at which Carrie called him by his Christian name without hankering after further marks of her favor.

"He is fond of you, of course!" said Max, feeling that he had no right to say this, but justifying

it to himself on the ground of his wish to help her out of her wretched position.

"Well, I suppose he is."

"Are you—of course I've no right to ask—but are you fond of him?"

Carrie shook her head with indifference.

"I like him in my way," said she. "Not in his way. There's a great difference."

"And do you like any man—in his way?"

The girl replied with a significant gesture of disgust, which had in it nothing of coquetry, nothing of affectation.

"No," said she, shortly.

"Why do you answer like that?"

"Why? Oh, well, if you knew all that I've seen, you wouldn't wonder, you wouldn't want to ask."

"You won't always feel like that. You won't, when you have got away from this hole, and are living among decent people."

"The 'decent people' are those who leave me alone," said Carrie, shortly, "as they do here."

"As who do here? Who are the people who live in that shut-up house, besides you and your Granny, as you call her?"

"I—mustn't tell you. They don't belong to any county families. Is that enough?"

"Why are you so different now from what you

were when we were sitting by the fire in there? You are not like the same girl! Are you the same girl?"

And Max affected to feel, or, perhaps, really felt, a doubt which necessitated his coming a little closer to Carrie, without, however, being able to see much more of her face than before.

"I'm the same girl," replied Carrie, shortly, "whom you threatened with the police."

"Come, is that fair? Did I threaten *you* with the police?"

"You threatened *us*. It's the same thing. Well, it doesn't matter. They won't find out anything more than we choose!"

She said this defiantly, ostentatiously throwing in her lot with the dubious characters from whom Max would fain have dissociated her.

"Do you forget," he asked, suddenly, "that these precious friends of yours left you, forgot you, for two whole days—left you to the company of a dead man, to a chance stranger? Is that what you call kindness—friendship—affection?"

She made no answer.

A moment later a voice was heard calling softly: "Carrie?"

The girl came out of the shelter of the eaves, and Max at last caught sight of her face. It was

sad, pale, altogether different from what the reckless, defiant, rather hard tones of her latest words would have led him to expect. A haunting face, Max thought.

"I must go," said she. "Good-bye."

"Carrie!" repeated the voice, calling again, impatiently.

Max knew, although he could not see the owner of the voice, that it was "Dick." It was, he thought, a coarse voice, full of intimations of the swaggering self-assertion of the low-class Londoner, who thinks himself the whole world's superior.

Carrie called out:

"All right; I 'm coming!" And then she turned to Max. "You are to forget this place, and me," said she, in a whisper.

The next moment Max found himself alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEQUEL TO A TRAGEDY.

It was on the evening after that of his expedition to Limehouse that Max Wedmore found himself back again at the modest iron gate of the park at The Beeches. He had not sent word what time he should arrive, preferring not to have to meet Doreen by herself, with her inevitable questions, sooner than he could help.

As he shut the gate behind him, and hurried up the drive toward the house, he felt a new significance in the words "Home, Sweet Home," and shuddered at the recollection that he had, in the thirty odd hours since he left it, given up the hope of ever seeing it again.

It was a little difficult, though, on this prosaic home-coming, to realize all he had passed through since he last saw the red house, with its long, dignified front, its triangular pediment rising up against the dark-blue night sky, and the group of

rambling outbuildings, stables, laundries, barns, all built with a magnificent disregard of the value of space, which straggled away indefinitely to the right, in a grove of big trees and a tangle of brushwood.

Lines of bright light streaming between drawn window curtains showed bright patches on the lawn and the shrubs near the house. As Max passed through the iron gate which shut in the garden from the park, a group of men and boys, shouting, encouraging one another with uncouth cries, rushed out from the stable yard toward the front of the house.

"What's the matter?" asked Max of a stable boy, whom he seized by the shoulders and stopped in the act of uttering a wild whoop.

"It 's the log, sir," replied the lad, sobered by the sudden appearance of the young master, who seemed in no hilarious mood.

"The log! What log?"

"Master has ordered one for Christmas, sir, the biggest as could be got," answered the boy, who then escaped, to rush back and join the shouting throng.

And Max remembered that his father, in his passionate determination to have a real old English Christmas, with everything done in the proper

manner, had given this order to the head gardener a few days before.

By this time the group had become a crowd. A swarm of men and boys, conspicuous among whom were all the idlers and vagabonds of the neighborhood, came along through the yard in one great, overwhelming wave, hooting, yelling, trampling down the flower-beds with their winter covering of cocoanut fiber, breaking down the shrubs, tearing away the ivy, and spreading devastation as they went.

Poor Mr. Wedmore had instructed his servants not to prevent the villagers from joining in the procession. There was something reminiscent of feudal times, a pleasant suggestion of the cordial relation between the lord of the manor of the Middle Ages and his tenants and dependents, in this procession of the Yule log up to the great house. And Mr. Wedmore, full of his fancy for the grand old mediæval Christmas festivities, hugged to his heart the thought of holding such revels as should make Christmas at The Beeches an institution in the countryside.

But, alas! the London merchant had become a country gentleman too late in life to appreciate the great gulf which lies between the sixteenth-century peasant (of the modern imagination) and the nine-

teenth-century villager of actual fact. His own small army from the stable and the garden were powerless to cope with the disorderly mob they had been encouraged to invite in this interesting celebration. And those most mischievous and conspicuous roughs whom the coachman had driven off with the whip on the way up, revenged themselves for this drastic treatment by coming in through the front gate of the park, breaking down the fence between park and garden, and every obstacle to their barbaric progress.

It was "Poaching Wilson" who pulled the bell, after some difficulty in finding the handle, owing to the liberality with which he had "treated himself" as a preparation for the journey.

Max, alarmed at the invasion, had made his way round to the billiard-room door at the back, bolted it on the inside, and hastened to give directions to the servants to lock all the other doors, and to secure the ground-floor windows.

Then he rushed into the hall, just as his father had come out from the dining-room, serviette in hand, to learn the cause of the noise outside.

"Hello, Max! Is it you back again? And have you brought down half the population of London with you?"

"No, sir, they didn't come with me. They are

guests of yours, I understand. And they expect to be treated to unlimited beer, so I gather from their remarks. They 've brought some firewood, I believe."

At this moment the clanging of the front-door bell resounded through the house for the second time. The frightened butler, who was a young man and rather nervous, stood by the door, not daring to open it. The ladies of the household had by this time come out of the dining-room ; Mrs. Wedmore looked flush and frightened ; the girls were tittering. Smothered explosions of laughter came from time to time to the ears of the master of the house, from the closed door which led to the servants' hall.

"Shall—shall I see who it is, sir?" asked the butler, who could hear the epithets applied to him on the other side of the door.

"No, no!" cried Doreen. "Not on any account! Tell them to put the thing down and go away."

There was a pause, during which the bell rang again, and there was a violent lunge at the door.

"They won't—they won't go away, Miss, without they get something first," said the butler, who was as white as a sheet.

"Tell them," began Mr. Wedmore, in a loud tone

of easy confidence, "to take it round to the back door, and—and to send a—deputation to me in the morning; when—er—they shall be properly rewarded for their trouble."

"They ought to reward us for *our* trouble, papa, don't you think?" suggested Doreen.

"There! They 've begun to reward themselves," said Queenie, as a stone came through one of the windows.

Mr. Wedmore was furious. He saw the mistake he had made, but he would not own it. Putting strong constraint upon himself, he assumed a gay geniality of manner which his looks belied, and boldly advanced to the door. But Mrs. Wedmore flung her arms round her husband in a capacious embrace, dragging him backward with an energy there was no use resisting.

"No, no, no, George! I won't have you expose yourself to those horrid roughs! Don't open the door, Bartram! Put up the bolt!"

"Nonsense! Nonsence, my dear!" retorted Mr. Wedmore, who was, perhaps, not so unwilling to be saved from the howling mob as he wished to appear. "It 's only good-humored fun—of a rough sort, perhaps, but quite harmless. It 's some mischievous boy who threw the stone. But, of course, they must go round to the back."

"Cook won't dare to open the door to 'em, sir," said the butler.

The situation was becoming serious. There was no denying that the house was besieged. Mrs. Wedmore began to feel like a châtelaine of the Cavalier party, with the Roundhead army at the doors clamoring for her husband's blood. The cries of the villagers were becoming more derisive.

As a happy thought, Mrs. Wedmore suggested haranguing the mob from an upper window. This course seemed rather ignominious, but prudence decided in its favor.

There was a rush upstairs, and Mr. Wedmore, followed by all the ladies, flung himself into the bathroom and threw up the window.

It was not at all the sort of thing that merry squire of the olden times might have been expected to do. In fact, as Doreen remarked, there were no bathrooms in the olden time to harangue a mob from. But Mr. Wedmore's mediæval ardor being damped, he submitted to circumstances with fortitude.

"Yah! There 'e is at last!" "'Ow are you, old un?" "Don't put your nose out too fur this cold night!"

These and similar ribald remarks greeted Mr. Wedmore as he appeared at the window, telling him

only too plainly that the merry days of old were gone, never to be restored, and that the feudal feeling which bound (or is supposed to have bound) rich and poor, gentle and simple, in one great tie of brotherhood had disappeared forever.

Doreen and Queenie were secretly enjoying the fun, though they had the sense to be very quiet; but Mrs. Wedmore was in an agony of sympathy with her husband, and of fear for the results of his enterprise. He began a speech of thanks, but the noise below was too great for him to be heard. Indeed, it was his own servants who did the most toward drowning his voice by their well-meant endeavors to shout down the interrupting cries.

"They 're most of them tipsy, I think," whispered Doreen to her mother, who said, "Sh–sh!" in shocked remonstrance, but secretly agreed with her daughter's verdict.

"Throw them some coppers, papa," suggested the sage and practical Queenie.

Mr. Wedmore turned out his pockets, taking care to disperse his largesse as widely as possible. The girls helped him, hunting high and low for coins, among which, urged by the crowd in no subdued voice to "come down handsome," sixpences and shillings presently made their welcome appearance.

"Oh, the hollies!" whispered Doreen to her sister.

"Thank goodness, the look of the garden to-morrow morning will be an object-lesson to papa!"

For the invaders, well aware of the value of such wares at Christmas time, filled out the pauses by slashing at the berry-bearing trees with their pocket-knives, secure in the safety of numbers.

By the time the shower of money ceased the crowd had begun to thin; those members of it who had been lucky enough to secure silver coins had made off in the direction of the nearest public-house, and those who had cut down the holly had taken themselves off with their booty.

There remained in front of the door, when this clearance had been effected, the Yule log itself, the laborers who had drawn it along and a group of manageable size.

Max, who had been watching the proceedings from the study, after turning out the light, judged that the moment had come for negotiations to commence. So he told the butler to throw open the front door, and he himself invited the unwelcome guests to enter. He had taken the precaution to have all portable articles removed from the hall and all the doors locked except that which led to the servants' hall and the staircases.

In they came, a little subdued, and with their first disastrous energy sufficiently exhausted for

them to be able to listen and to do as they were told.

The oaken center-table had been pushed on one side, and there was a clear space, wide, carpetless, from the front door to the big stone fireplace opposite.

"This way with the log! Now, boys, pull with a will!" cried Max, not insensible to the novelty and picturesqueness of the situation, as a motley crowd, some in smock-frocks, some in corduroy and some in gaiters and great-coats, pressed into the great hall dragging the log after them with many a "Whoop!" and shout and cry.

Mr. and Mrs. Wedmore and the two girls hurried downstairs on hearing the door open, and stood by the fireplace, with a little glow of satisfaction and pleasure at the turn affairs had taken.

It *was* a log! Or, rather, it was more than a log; for it was half a tree. Slowly the huge thing came in, scraping the nicely polished floor, rolling a little from side to side, and threatening all those within a yard of it. And then, when its appearance had spread consternation through the household, the inevitable question came: What was to be done with it?

The fire-basket had been taken out of the hearth on purpose for its reception, but it was evident that,

even after this careful preparation, to think of burning it whole was out of the question. There was nothing for it but to send for a saw and to reduce the log then and there to a manageable size.

This was done, amid considerable noise and excitement, drinking of the health of the family by villagers who had been drinking too much already, and much scraping of the polished floor by muddy, hob-nailed boots

Finally the deputation was got rid of, and the interrupted dinner was allowed to proceed, much to the comfort of Max, who had eaten nothing since breakfast, and much to the dismay of Mrs. Wedmore, who was then able to ascertain the extent of the damage done by the invaders.

It was lucky for Max that he had arrived at such an opportune moment. His father had been grumbling at the number of visits he had made to town lately, and the young man would have found him in no very good humor if he had not discovered to his hand the opportunity of making himself conspicuously useful.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Max did not tell any one about the adventures he had met with. He knew that he should have to go through the ordeal of an interview with his sister, Doreen, who would want to know a great deal more than he was

willing to tell her; but he was tired, and he made up his mind that he would not be interrogated that evening. So he gave her no opportunity for the confidential talk she was dying to have with him, but spent the remainder of the evening in dutiful attendance upon his mother.

The following day was Christmas Eve. Max came down late to breakfast, and he had scarcely entered the morning-room when his father handed him the *Standard*, pointing to a certain paragraph without any comment but a glance at the girls, as a hint to his son not to make any remark which would recall Dudley and his affairs to their minds.

The paragraph was as follows:

"SHOCKING DISCOVERY!

"The body of a man was found floating in the river close to Limehouse Pier late yesterday evening. Medical evidence points to death by violence, and the police are making inquiries. It is thought that the description of the body, which is that of a man of a Jewish type of countenance, rather under than over the middle height, aged between fifty and fifty-five, gray hair and short, gray beard, tallies with that given a few days ago by a woman who applied at the —— Street Police Court, alleging that her husband had disappeared in the above neighborhood. The police are extremely reticent, but at the present they have no clue to the authors of the outrage. The body awaits identification at the mortuary, and an inquest will be held to-day."

"I wonder whether Dudley will see that?" said Mr. Wedmore, in a low voice, as soon as his daughters were engaged in talk together. "It

looks like the sequel to the other paragraph which upset him so the other evening, doesn't it? I shall watch the papers for the result of the inquest. It seems to me pretty certain that it was Edward Jacobs. Curious affair, isn't it, that he should be murdered in a slum, after making a fortune at other people's expense? Retribution—just retribution! Curious, isn't it!"

To Max it was so much more than merely "curious," knowing what he did, that he felt sick with horror. Surely this body, found floating near Limehouse Pier, was the one he had touched in the dark!

CHAPTER XIV.

IS IT BLACKMAIL?

Mr. Wedmore repeated his comment: "Curious, isn't it?" before Max could reply. At last he nodded, and handed back the paper to his father. Then he turned his chair toward the fire, and stared at the blazing coals. He had lost his appetite; he felt cold, miserable.

His father could not help noticing that something was wrong with him; and, after watching him furtively for a few minutes, he said, with an abruptness which made Max start:

"Did you see anything of Dudley when you were in town?"

Max changed color, and glanced apprehensively at his father, as if fearing some suspicion in the unexpected question.

"No, sir," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "I called at his chambers; but they told me he had gone away for the holidays and had left no

address. All letters were to be kept for him till his return."

Both question and answer had been uttered very softly, but Max saw, by the look on Doreen's face, as she glanced over from the other side of the table, that she guessed what they were talking about, if she had not heard their words.

"Aren't you going to have any breakfast, Max?" asked she, as she came round to him. "We've kept everything about for you, and we want the table."

"Well, you can have it," said he, jumping up, quickly, and making for the door. "I don't want any breakfast this morning."

"Nonsense. You will not be allowed to leave the room until you have had some," retorted his sister, as she sprang at him and attempted to pinion his arms. "We allow no ill-temper on Christmas Eve, especially as we've got a surprise for you—a beautiful, real surprise. Guess who is coming this morning to stay till New Year!"

Queenie had come up by this time, and the two girls between them brought their brother back to the table, where the younger sister began to pour out his coffee.

But Max refused to show the slightest interest in the coming guest, and would not at-

tempt to guess who it was. So they had to tell him.

"It was all on your account that we asked her," said Doreen, hurt by his indifference. "You took such a fancy to her, and she to you, apparently, at the Hutchinsons' dance, that we thought you 'd be delighted. *Now*, don't you know who it is?"

To their great disappointment, both girls saw that he didn't. Mr. Wedmore, from the other end of the room, was observing this little incident with considerable annoyance. The young lady in question, Miss Mildred Appleby, was very pretty, and would be well dowered, and Mr. Wedmore had entered heartily into the plan of inviting her to spend Christmas with them, in the hope that Max would propose, be accepted, and that he would then make up his mind to settle.

"Why, it's Mildred Appleby," said Doreen, impatiently, when her brother's blank look had given her the wrong answer. "Surely, you don't mean to say you've forgotten all about her?"

"Oh, no, I remember her," answered Max, indifferently. "Tall girl with a fashion-plate face, waltzes pretty well and can't talk. Yes, I remember her, of course."

"Is that all you have to say about her?" cried Doreen, betraying her disappointment. "Why, a

month ago she was the nicest and the jolliest and the everythingest girl you had ever met."

"He 's seen somebody else since then," remarked the observant Queenie, in her dry, little voice. "When he was in town yesterday, perhaps."

Max looked at his sister with a curious expression. Was she right? Had he, in that adventurous thirty-six hours in London, seen somebody who took the color out of all the other girls he had ever met? He asked himself this question when Queenie's shrewd eyes met his, and he remembered the strange sensation he had felt at the touch of Carrie's hand, at the sound of her voice.

Before he could answer his sister, Mr. Wedmore spoke impatiently:

"Rubbish!" cried he, testily. "Every young man thinks it the proper thing to talk like that, as if no girl was good enough for him. Miss Appleby is a charming girl, and she will find plenty of admirers without waiting for Max's valuable adoration."

He had much better not have spoken, blundering old papa that he was. And both daughters thought so, as they saw Max raise his eyebrows and gather in all the details of the little plot in one sweeping glance at the faces around him. He drank his coffee, but he could not eat. Doreen sat watching him, ready to spring upon him at the first possible

moment, and to carry him off for the *tête-à-tête* he was so anxious to put off.

What should he tell his sister of that adventure of his in the slums of the East End? Would she be satisfied if he told a white lie, if he said he had found out nothing?

Max felt that Doreen would not be satisfied if he got himself out of the difficulty like that. In the first place, she would not believe him. He saw that her quick eyes had been watching him since his return, and he felt that he had been unable to hide the fact that something of greater significance had occurred during that brief stay in town. What then should he tell her? Perfect frankness, perfect confidence was out of the question. To look back now, in the handsome, spacious house of his parents, from the snug depths of an easy-chair, on the time he had passed on and about the wharf by the docks, was so strange that Max could hardly believe in his own experiences.

Who would believe the story of his adventures, if he himself could scarcely do so? Would Doreen, would anybody give credence to the story of the dead body that he touched, but never saw, the eyes that looked at him from an unbroken wall, the girl who lured him into the shut-up house, and then let him out again with an air of secrecy and mystery?

The transition had been so abrupt from the gloomy wharf, with its suspicious surroundings and the heavy, fog-laden air of the riverside, back to the warmth and light and brightness of home, that already his adventures had receded into a sort of dreamland, and he began to ask himself whether Carrie, with her fair hair and moving blue eyes, her vibrating voice and changeful expression, were not a creature of his imagination only.

He was still under the influence of the feelings roused by this dreamy remembrance, when he snatched the opportunity afforded by Doreen's being called away by Mrs. Wedmore, to go out into the grounds, on his way to the stables. A ride through the lanes in the frosty air would, he thought, be the best preparation for the trying ordeal of that inevitable talk with Doreen, whose wistful eyes haunted him as she waited for a chance of speaking to him alone.

In the garden a scene of desolation met his eye.

The lawns were torn up and trodden down; the gravel path from the stables looked like a freshly plowed field; every tree and every bush bore the marks of the marauder.

The head gardener was in a condition of unapproachable ferocity, and it was generally understood that he had given notice to leave. The

under-gardeners kept out of the way, but could be heard at intervals checking outbursts of derisive laughter behind the shrubberies. The story of the Yule log and its adventures was the best joke the country had had for a long time, and it was bound to lose nothing as it passed from mouth to mouth. And poor Mr. Wedmore began to dread the ordeal of congratulations he would have to go through when he next went to church.

Max felt sorry for his father. As he entered the stable-yard, which was a wide expanse of flagged ground at the back of the house, round which were many outbuildings, he came upon a group of snickering servants, all enjoying the story of the master's freak.

The group broke up guiltily on the appearance of Max, the laundry-maids taking flight in one direction, while the stablemen became suddenly busy with yard-broom and leather.

Max put a question or two to the groom who saddled his horse for him.

"There was no great harm done last night, was there, except in the garden? You have not heard of anything being stolen, eh?"

"Well, no, sir. But it brought a lot of people up as had no business here. There was a person come up as we couldn't get rid of, asking questions about

the family, sir; and about Mr. Horne, too, sir. She wouldn't believe as he wasn't here, an' she frightened some of the women, I believe, sir. They didn't know where she'd got to, an' nobody saw her go out of the place, so they've got an idea she's hiding about. A fortune-telling tramp, most likely, sir," added the man, who wished he had held his tongue about the intruder when he saw how strongly the young master was affected by this story.

The fact was that Max instantly connected this apparition of a woman "who asked questions about Mr. Horne" with the ugly story told him at the house by the wharf, and he was glad that Dudley was not spending Christmas at The Beeches.

He was oppressed during the whole of his ride by this suggestion that the questionable characters of the wharfside were pursuing Dudley; it gave color to Carrie's statement that it was Dudley who killed the man whom Max believed to have been Edward Jacobs; and it looked as if the object of the woman's visit was to levy blackmail.

Or was it—could it be that the woman was Carrie, and that her object was to warn Dudley? To associate Carrie herself with the levying of blackmail was not possible to the susceptible Max in the present state of his feelings toward her.

And, just as he was meditating upon this mystery, all unprepared for a meeting with his sister, Doreen waylaid him. He was entering the house by the back way, muddy from his ride, when she sprang upon him from an ambush on the stairs.

"I 've been waiting all the morning to catch you alone," said she, as she ran out from behind the tall clock and seized his arm. "You 've been trying to avoid me. Don't deny it. I say you have. As if it was any use! No, you shall not go upstairs and take off your boots first. You will just come into the study, mud and all, and tell me—tell me what you *know*, not what you have been making up, mind! I 'm going to have the truth."

"Well, you can't," returned her brother, shortly, as he allowed himself to be dragged across the hall, which looked cheerless enough without a fire, and with the great, clumsy, hideous, maimed old Yule log filling up the fireplace and reminding everybody of all that it had cost.

Doreen pushed him into the study and shut the door.

"Why can't I know the truth?" asked she, eying him steadily. "Do you mean that you have found out Dudley doesn't care for me '

Max glanced at his sister's face, and then looked away. He had not known till that moment, when

he caught the tender look of anxiety in her big brown eyes, how strong her love of Dudley was. An impulse of anger against the man seized him, and he frowned.

"Why, surely you know already that he doesn't care for you, in the way he ought to care, or he would never have neglected you, never have given you up!" said he, ferociously.

"I'm not so sure about that. At any rate I want to know what you found out. Don't think I 'm not strong enough to bear it, whatever it is!"

"Well, then, I 'll tell you. He *is* off his head. He has got mixed up in some way with a set of people no sane man would trust himself with for half an hour, and—and—and—well, they say—the people say he 's done something that would hang him. There! Is that enough for you?"

He felt that he was a brute to tell her, but he could see no other way out of the difficulty in which her own persistency had placed him. She stared at him for a few seconds with blanched cheeks, clasping her hands. Then she said in a whisper:

"You don't mean—murder?"

Her brother's silence gave her the answer.

There was a long pause. Then she spoke in a changed voice, under her breath:

"Poor Dudley!"

Max was astonished to see her take the announcement so quietly.

"Well, now you see that it is impossible to do anything for him, don't you?"

"Indeed, I do not!" retorted Doreen, with spirit. "We don't know the story yet. We don't know whether there is any truth in it at all; or, if there is, what the difficulties were that he was in. Look, Max. You must remember how worried he has been lately. I have heard him make excuses for people who did rash things, and I have always agreed with him. You see, I knew how good-hearted he was, and I know that he would never have done anything mean or underhand or un worthy."

"Don't you call murder, manslaughter—whatever it is—unworthy?" asked Max, irritably.

"Not without knowing something about it," answered she. "And I think there's generally more to be said for the man who commits murder than for any other criminal. And—and"—her voice gave way and began to shake with tears—"I don't care what he's done, I'm sorry for him. I—I want to help him, or—or, at least, I want to see him to tell him so!"

Max was alarmed. Knowing the spirit and courage of his brilliant sister, he was afraid lest she

should conceive the idea of starting off herself on some mad enterprise ; so he said hastily :

"He 's away now, you know. He 's gone without leaving any address. Perhaps I was wrong, after all. Perhaps when he comes back he will be himself again, and—and everything will be cleared up. We can only wait and see."

But this lame attempt at comfort met with no warm response from his sister. She looked at him with a poor little attempt at a contemptuous smile, and then, afraid of breaking down altogether, sprang up from the arm-chair in which she had been sitting and left him to himself.

Max did not recover his usual spirits at luncheon, where everybody else was full of mirthful anticipation of the household dance, another idea of Mr. Wedmore's, which was to be a feature of the evening. And after that meal, instead of offering to drive to the station to meet Miss Appleby, as everybody had expected, Max took himself off, nobody knew where, and did not return home until dusk.

Coming through a little side gate in the park, he got into the great yard behind the house, where the stables stood on one side and a huge barn, which was only used as a storage place for lumber, on the other. And it occurred to him that if the woman of whom the groom told him were still hanging

about the premises, as the servants seemed to think, this was the very place she might be expected to choose as a hiding-place.

So he pushed open the great, creaking door of the barn and went in. It was very dark in there, and the air was cold and damp. A musty smell from old sacks, rotting wood and mildewed straw came to his nostrils, as he made his way carefully over the boards with which the middle part of the barn had, for some forgotten purpose or other, been floored.

Little chinks of light from above showed great beams, some with ropes hanging from them, and stacks of huge lumber of fantastic shapes to right and left.

Max stood still in the middle of the floor and listened for a sound. But he heard nothing. Suddenly he thought of the signal by the use of which he had summoned Carrie to the door of the house by the wharf.

Getting close to one of the piles of lumber, he gave two taps on the panel of a broken wooden chest, waited a couple of seconds, and then gave two taps more.

There was a shuffling noise along the boards on the other side of the stack, followed by the striking of a match.

Max was around the obstacle in a moment. Holding a piece of candle in her bony hand was Mrs. Higgs.

"Hello!" said he.

She said nothing. But the candle shook in her hand, and by the glassy look of dull yet fierce surprise in her colorless eyes Max saw that this woman, who had connived at his imprisonment in the room with the dead man, had never expected to see him again—alive.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. WEDMORE'S SECOND FREAK.

Even if Max had not had such an ugly experience of the ways of Mrs. Higgs, even if this meeting with her in the barn had been his first, his sensations would hardly have been agreeable ones. There was something uncanny about the old woman, something which her quiet, shuffling movements and her apparent lack of interest in what went on around her only served to accentuate. Even now, while suffering the shock of a great surprise, Max could feel rather than see the effect which the unexpected meeting had upon her.

For she uttered no cry, no word; her eyes scarcely opened wider than before. Her jaw dropped a little, and then began to move rapidly up and down; that was all. And yet, as Max looked at her—at this helpless, infirm old creature with the palsied hands and the lackluster eyes—he shivered.

"You vile old hag!" thought he to himself. And then his thoughts flew to Carrie, and he asked himself what the attraction could be which bound her to this wicked old woman.

Mrs. Higgs, after staring at him in dead silence for what seemed a long time, asked, as composedly as if their meeting had been the most natural thing in the world:

"Where 's your friend, young man?"

"W—what friend?" stammered Max.

"Oh, you don't know, I suppose!" retorted Mrs. Higgs, derisively. "No more than you know what you wanted to come spying about Plumtree Wharf for, eh?"

Max made no answer. There came a vixenish gleam into the old woman's faded eyes.

"What did you come for, eh?" pursued she, sharply. "Who sent you? Not he, I know! When he 's got anything to do at the wharf he comes himself."

And Mrs. Higgs gave an ugly, mirthless chuckle.

As Max stared at the withered, lined face, which was growing each moment more repulsive in his eyes, a feeling of horror and of intense pity for Dudley seized him. To be pursued, as his friend evidently was pursued, by this vicious old hag, was a fate hideous enough to expiate every crime in the Decalogue.

A little rapid reflection made him decide that a bold course of defiance was the best to be taken. Whatever Dudley might have done, and whatever terrors Mrs. Higgs might hold over his head, it was very certain, after all, that the evidence of such a creature, living in such an underground fashion, could never be a serious danger to a man in his position. Dudley himself seemed rather to have lost sight of this fact, certainly; but it could not be less than a fact for all that.

"Mr. Horne is not likely to trouble you or the rest of the thieves at the wharf again," said Max, with decision. "He's gone abroad for a holiday. And if you don't take yourself off at once, or if you turn up here again, or if you attempt to annoy us or Mr. Horne, in any way whatever, you'll find the police at your heels before you know where you are."

Then into her dull eyes there came a look of malignity which made Max doubt whether he had done well to be so bold.

"Thieves, eh? Tell your friend we're thieves, and see what he says to that! Police, eh? Tell your friend *that*, tell your friend *that*, and see whether he'll thank you for your interference!"

"Mr. Horne is away, as I told you."

"Away, is he? But he won't be away long. Oh, no; he'll come back—he'll come back. Or if he doesn't," added Mrs. Higgs, with complacency, "I'll fetch him."

"Well, you've got to leave this place at once," said Max, with decision. "We don't allow strangers in the barn, and if you don't go quietly at once, I must send somebody to turn you out."

Mrs. Higgs kept her eyes fixed upon him with her usual blank stare while he said this in a very loud and decided tone. When he had finished she suddenly blew out the light with so much unnecessary force that Max felt something like a gust of wind upon his face.

"Turn me out!" and she laughed harshly. "Turn me out! Send for the police to do it, if you like."

Max went out of the barn, listening to her cackling laugh, and not feeling comfortable until he had found his way into the open air. He at once gave orders to the stablemen and gardeners to search the barn and to turn out the strangers they might find there.

But though they hunted in every corner, they found no one, and Max was only too glad to come to the conclusion that Mrs. Higgs had taken his advice, and got away with as little delay as possible.

This incident, however, following so closely on the heels of his experiences at the wharf, took away all the zest with which Max should have entered into the programme which, by Mr. Wedmore's special wish, had been prepared for that evening; and while Doreen and Queenie and Mildred Appleby and two young nephews of Mr. Wedmore's chattered and laughed, and made dinner a very lively affair, Max was quiet and what his cousins called "grumpy," and threatened to be a wet blanket on the evening's entertainment.

"Going to have all the servants in to dance Sir Roger!" cried he, in dismay, when Doreen told him the news. "Good heavens! Hasn't he had a lesson in yesterday's tomfoolery and what came of it? How do the servants like the idea?"

"Of course they hate it," answered Doreen, "and mamma has been all day trying to coax the cook to indulge him, and not to walk off and leave us to cook the Christmas dinner. And, of course, this assurance that the notion was distasteful to everybody had made papa more obstinate than ever. Oh, we shall have a merry time."

Now, down in the depths of his heart Mr. Wedmore had begun to feel some misgivings about his plans for keeping Christmas in the good old fashion. But the first failure, the colossal mistake of the Yule Log, had made him obstinate instead of yielding, and he had set his teeth and made up his mind that they should all be merry in the way he chose, or they should not be merry at all.

The fact was that this prosaic middle-aged gentleman, who had passed the greater part of his life immersed in day-books and ledgers and the details of a busy city man's life, found time hang heavy on his hands in these prosperous days of his retirement, and in this condition he had had his mind inflamed by pictures of the life that was led in The Beeches by his forerunners, easy-going, hard-riding, hard-drinking country gentlemen, with whom, if the truth were known, he had nothing in common.

Fired by the desire to live the life they led, to enjoy it in the pleasant old fashion, it had seemed to him an especially happy custom to give a dance at which masters and servants should join hands and make merry together. He had never assisted at one of these balls, and he refused to listen to his wife's suggestion that it should take place in the servants' hall, that the servants should be allowed to invite their own friends, and that the family

should limit itself to one brief dance with their dependants and then leave them to enjoy themselves in their own way.

No, it was his will that the dance should be held in the hall of the house, and that the pictures of the Illustrated Christmas Numbers should be realized to the utmost.

Dinner, therefore, was scrambled over in a hurry, and the family with their guests went upstairs to the drawing-room or out to the billiard-room, while preparations were made for the great event of the evening, the lighting of the Yule Log and Sir Roger de Coverley.

Then the first mishap occurred in the inopportune arrival of the Rev. Lisle Lindsay, whose rather sedate and solemn appearance cast a slight gloom upon everybody's spirits, which deepened when Queenie whispered to Mildred that he looked upon dancing as a frivolous and worldly amusement scarcely to be tolerated and never to be encouraged.

He soon made an opportunity of devoting himself to Doreen, who was playing the lightest of light music at the piano in the corner of the room.

It had been a fancy of Mr. Wedmore's, who had his own way in everything with his wife, to have this drawing-room, which was large and square and

lighted by five windows, three at the front and two at the side, furnished entirely with old things of the style of eighty years back, with Empire chairs, sofas and cabinets, as little renovated as possible. The effect was quaint and not unpleasing; a little cold, perhaps, but picturesque and graceful.

The grand piano had a case specially made for it, painted a dull sage-green and finished in a manner to give it a look of the less massive harpsichord.

It was at this instrument that Doreen sat, making a very pretty picture in her white silk, square-necked frock, with bands of beaver fur on the bodice and sleeves and an edging of the same fur round the bottom of the skirt.

"My purpose in coming here to-night, Miss Wedmore," said Mr. Lindsay, when he had delivered an unimportant message from the vicar's wife about the church decorations, "was really to bring you my good wishes for this blessed season. I am afraid I shall have no opportunity of speaking to you to-morrow, though, of course, I shall see you in the church."

"Oh, yes, we shall all be at church," said Doreen, quickly.

She noted something rather unusual in the curate's manner—a nervous excitement which presaged danger; and she dashed into an air from

"The Shop-Girl" with an energy which was meant to have the effect of checking his solemn ardor.

But the curate had the stuff of a man in him, and did not mean to be put off. This opportunity was really a good one, for the talk in the room, which his arrival had checked for an instant, was now going on merrily. Mrs. Wedmore did her best to keep up the conversation. Nothing would have pleased her better than to see Doreen transfer her tender feeling for the discredited Dudley to such a suitable and irreproachable person as Lisle Lindsay. She kept a hopeful eye on the pair at the piano while she went on talking to her husband's old friend, Mrs. Hutchinson, who was staying with them for Christmas.

"And at the same time," went on Mr. Lindsay, as he moved his chair a little nearer, so that, under cover of the music, he could speak without being overheard, "to speak to you on a subject which is—is—in fact, very near my heart."

This was worse than Doreen had expected. She glanced round at him with rather a frightened expression. "Oh, don't let us talk about anything—anything serious now," said she. "Just when we shall be going downstairs to—to dance—in a few minutes."

It was a very inconsequent objection to make, and Mr. Lindsay simply ignored it.

"It is, in fact, about myself that I wish to speak, Miss Wedmore," he pursued relentlessly. "You cannot have failed to notice what a—what a deep interest I take in all that concerns you. And latterly I have flattered myself that"—

"But people should never flatter themselves about anything!" cried Doreen, desperately, as she suddenly laid her hands in her lap and turned from the piano to face the worst. "Now I'll give you an example. I flattered myself a little while ago that a man cared a great deal about me—a man I cared a great deal for myself. And all the while he didn't; or, at least, I am afraid he didn't. And yet, you know, I can't help hoping that perhaps I didn't only flatter myself, after all; that perhaps he will come back some day and tell me I was right."

Mr. Lindsay heard her in silence, with his mild eyes fixed on the carpet. But when she had finished he looked up again, and she was shocked to find that the gentle obstinacy which had been in his face before was there still.

"I am, indeed, sorry for your disappointment," he said sweetly. "Or rather I should be if it were such a one that you could not hope to—to—in fact, to get over it. But—but these are trials which may

be, perhaps, only sent to show that you, even you, happily placed as you are and gifted of the Almighty, are human, after all, and not beyond suffering. And—and it may give you an opportunity of seeing that there are others who can appreciate you better, and who would only be too glad to—to —to—"

"To step into his shoes!" finished Doreen for him, with a sigh. "I know what you were going to say, and if you won't be stopped, I suppose I must hear you out. But, oh, dear, I do wish you wouldn't!"

He was not to be put off like that. In fact, he was not to be put off by any available means. He sighed a little, and persisted.

"I am glad you have guessed what I was going to say, Miss Wedmore, though I should not have put it quite in that way. And why should you not want to hear it? I should have thought that even you must be not quite indifferent to any man's honest feelings of esteem and admiration toward you!"

Doreen was looking at him helplessly, with wide-open eyes. Did he really think any girl was ever moved by this sort of address, deliberately uttered, with the words well chosen, well considered? As different as possible from the abrupt, staccato method used by Dudley in the dear old days!

"Oh, I'm not indifferent at all!" said she, quickly. "I'm never indifferent to anything or anybody. But I'm sorry, very sorry that—that you should feel—"

She stopped short, looked at him for a moment curiously, and asked with great abruptness:

"*Do* you feel anything in the matter? *Really* feel, I mean? I don't think you do; I don't think you can. You couldn't speak so *nicely*, if you did."

He looked at her with gentle reproach. His was not a very tempestuous feeling, perhaps, but it was genuine, honest, sincere. He thought her the most splendid specimen of handsome, healthy well-brought-up womanhood he had ever met, and he thought also that the beneficent influence of the Church, exercised through the unworthy medium of himself, would mold her into a creature as near perfection as was humanly possible.

Her way of receiving his advances was perplexing. He was not easily disconcerted, but he did not answer her immediately. Then he said softly:

"How could I speak in any way but what you call 'nicely' to *you?* To the lady whom I am asking to be my wife?"

Doreen looked startled.

"Oh, don't, please! You don't know what a mistake you're making. I'm not at all the sort of wife

for you, really! Indeed, I couldn't recommend myself as a wife to anybody, but especially to you."

"Why—especially to me?"

"Well, I'm not good enough."

"That sounds rather flattering. And yet, somehow, I don't fancy you mean it to be so."

"Well, no, I don't," said Doreen, frankly; "for I mean by 'good' a lot of qualities that I don't think highly of myself, such as getting up in the middle of the night to go to early service, and being civil to people I hate, and—and a lot of things like that. Don't you know that I'm eminently deficient in all the Christian virtues?"

This was a question the curate had never asked himself; but it came upon him at this moment with disconcerting force that she was right. Luckily for his self-esteem, it did not occur to him at the same time that it was this very lack of the conventional virtues, a certain freshness and originality born of her defiant neglect of them, which formed the stronger part of her attractiveness in his eyes.

After a short pause he answered, with his usual deliberation:

"Indeed, I am quite sure that you do yourself injustice."

"Oh, but I'm equally sure that I don't. I not only leave undone the things which you would say

I ought to do, and do the things which I ought not to do, but I 'm rather proud of it."

Still, Mr. Lindsay would not accept the repulse. He persisted in making excuses for her and in believing them.

"Well, you fulfill your most important duty; you are the happiness and the brightness of the house. Your father's face softens whenever you come near him. Now, as that is your chief duty, and you fulfill it so well, I am quite sure that if you entered another state of life where your duties would be different, you would accommodate yourself, you would fulfill your new duties as well as you did the old."

Doreen rewarded him for this speech with a humorous look, in which there was something of gratitude, but more of rebellion.

"Accommodate myself? No, I couldn't. I think, do you know, that if I were ever foolish enough to marry—and it would be foolishness in a spoiled creature like me—I should want a husband who could accommodate himself to me. Now, you couldn't. Clergymen never accommodate themselves to anything or anybody."

The Reverend Lisle Lindsay did at last look rather disconcerted. Mischievous Doreen saw her triumph and made the most of it.

"So that settles the matter, doesn't it? I can't accommodate myself; you can't either. What could possibly come of a union like that?"

"The greatest happiness this world is capable of affording, and the hope of a happiness more abiding hereafter," said he; "all the happiness that a true woman can bring to the man she loves."

Doreen threw up her head quickly.

"Ah! that's just it," cried she. "'To the man she loves!' But you are not the man I love, Mr. Lindsay. I suppose it 's one of the things I ought not to do—one of the unconventional and so unchristian things—to own that I love a man who doesn't love me. But I do. Now, you know who it is, and everybody knows; but, for all that, you mustn't tell; you must keep it as a secret that Doreen Wedmore—proud, stuck-up Doreen—is breaking her heart for the sake of a man who—who—" Her voice broke and she paused for a moment to recover herself; then she said, in a lighter tone: "Ah, well, we mustn't be hard upon him, either, for we don't know—it 's so difficult to know."

She sprang up from her seat; and the curate rose too. By her tactful mention of her own unlucky love she had softened the blow of her rejection of him. She had been rather too kind indeed, considering the tenacity of the person she had to deal

with ; for the curate considered his case by no means so hopeless as it was ; and instead of taking himself off forlornly, as she would have wished, he stayed on until the young men swarmed up from the billiard-room and bore the whole party down to the hall.

Mr. Wedmore, in great glee at having carried his point in the face of the family resistance, led Mrs. Hutchinson down stairs, and then handed her over to Max, while he himself threw open the door leading to the servants' quarters, and invited the group of neat maids and stalwart young men from the garden and stable to enter.

But here there was a hitch in the arrangements. The cook, in a bad temper, smarting with disapproval of the whole business, had refused to join the others, and, as nothing could be done without her, Mr. Wedmore had to penetrate into the servants' hall, where he found her sitting in state, and, luckily, dressed for the occasion.

Never in his life had Mr. Wedmore exerted himself so much to please any woman as he now did to soften the outraged feelings of the cook, who was a stout, red-faced woman, whose days of comeliness and charm were long since gone by. He at last succeeded in inducing her to accompany him to the hall, where he arrived in triumph, with a flushed

face and nervous manner, after an interval which had been put to great advantage by the younger gentlemen of the party, who were all anxious to dance with the prettiest housemaid.

Their eagerness had the effect of annoying the rest of the maids, and effectually spoiling whatever enjoyment they might have got out of the dance in the circumstances, while it by no means pleased the ladies of the family and their friends, who stood a little apart and whispered to each other that this sort of thing was bound to be a failure, and why couldn't papa, dear old, stupid papa, leave *them* out of the affair, and let the boys have a romp in the servants' hall without their assistance?

The pause had made the ladies so frigid and the men-servants so shy, the pretty housemaid so merry and the plain ones so solemn, that disaster threatened the gathering, when Mr. Wedmore and the cook made their opportune appearance.

Max, his cousins and young Hutchinson gave three cheers, in the midst of which demonstration the Rev. Lisle Lindsay endeavored to make his escape by the front door.

Unhappily, Mr. Wedmore, elated by his victory over the cook, espied him, and straightway forbade him to leave the house until after "Sir Roger." In vain the curate protested; pleaded

the privileges and exemptions of his sacred calling.

Mr. Wedmore was obdurate ; and, to the disgust of everybody, including himself, the Rev. Lisle Lindsay found himself told off to dance with the pretty housemaid, being the only man in the room who was not anxious for the honor.

This mishap cast a gloom over the proceedings. The rest of the gentlemen found it hard to extract a word from the other maids, who all considered themselves slighted. And Mr. Wedmore had great difficulty in persuading the men-servants to come forward and take their places by the partners he chose for them. To get them to choose for themselves was out of the question, after one young gardener had availed himself of the invitation by darting across the floor and asking Miss Queenie, in a hoarse voice and with many blushes, if she would dance with him.

Of course, this piece of daring made a sensation so great that to get another man follow the bold example was impossible.

In the end, Mrs. Wedmore found a partner in the coachman, who was a portly and solemn person, with no talents in the way of dancing or of conversation. Doreen danced with the butler, who, between nervousness and gloom, found it impossible

to conceal his opinion that master was making a fool of himself; and the rest of the company being quite as ill matched, "Sir Roger" was performed with little grace and less liveliness, while the Yule Log, after emitting a great deal of smoke, sputtered out into blackness, to everybody's relief.

The end of it was, however, a little better than the beginning. As the dancers warmed to their work, their latent enthusiasm for the exercise was awakened; and "Sir Roger" was kept up until the fingers of the organist, who had been engaged to play for them on a piano placed in a corner of one of the passages, ached with the cold and with the hard work.

When the dance was over and the party had broken up, Doreen, who had done her best to keep up the spirits of the rest, broke down. Max met her on her way to her room, and saw that the tears were very near her eyes.

"What 's the matter now?" said he, crossly. "You seemed all right downstairs. I thought you and Lindsay seemed to be getting on very well together."

"Did you? Well, you were wrong," said she, briefly, as she shut herself into the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MESSAGE FROM THE WHARF.

Christmas was over, and The Beeches had subsided into its normal state of prosperous tranquility. Max had had a fresh situation discovered for him, and he was now wasting his time on a stool in a merchant's office, as he had wasted it in other offices many times before. His father's chronic state of exasperation with his laziness was growing acute, and he had informed Max that unless he chose to stick to his work this time he would have to be shipped off to the Cape. No entreaties on the part of Mrs. Wedmore or the girls were of any avail against this fixed resolution on Mr. Wedmore's part, or against the inflexible laziness of Max himself. He detested office work, and he confessed that if he was not to be allowed to lead the country life he loved, he would prefer enlistment in the Cape Mounted Police to drudgery in a dark corner of a city office.

It was on a foggy evening in January that Max,

for the first time in three weeks (an unprecedented interval), knocked at the door of Dudley Horne's chambers-

There was a long delay, and Max, after a second knock, was going to withdraw, in the belief that Dudley was not in, after all, when he heard slow steps within, and paused.

The door was opened a very little way, and Dudley looked out.

Max stared at him for a moment without speaking. For over his friend there had passed some great change. Dudley had never been florid of complexion, but now he looked ghastly. His face had always been grave and strong rather than cheerful, but now the expression of his countenance was forbidding.

He looked at Max, glanced down the stairs, and nodded without a smile.

"Hello!" said he, with the letter of familiarity, but without its spirit. "Haven't seen anything of you for a century. Up in town again, eh?"

"Yes. Can't I come in?" said Max.

Dudley had come outside instead of inviting his friend in. At these words, however, he turned abruptly, and himself led the way into the little ante-chamber.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes, come in, of course. Come in."

Max accepted the cool invitation in silence, shut the door behind him, and followed his friend into the sitting-room, where the table was laid for a solitary dinner.

But it was the writing-table which caught the eye of Max and riveted his attention. For a photograph lay there, a woman's photograph, and as it was just in front of the chair Dudley had been using, as if he had been occupied in looking at it, it was not unnatural that the brother of Doreen should be curious to know whose picture it was.

So Max got around the table quickly by the opposite way to that which Dudley took, and threw himself into a chair by the writing-table in such a position that he could see what was on it. And he saw two things: One was that the photograph was that of Doreen; the other that a postal order for one pound, which lay beside the photograph, and upon which the ink was not yet dry, was made out to "Mrs. Edward Jacobs."

Max felt himself blushing as Dudley snatched up the postal orders—there were two of them—and slip them into an envelope. Then the eyes of the two men met. And Dudley knew what Max had seen.

He seemed to hesitate a moment, then glanced at Max again, sat down to the writing-table, and

took up a pen. As he directed the letter, he said quietly:

"Do you know whom I 'm sending this money to?"

"Well, I did catch sight of the name," stammered Max, unable to hide the fact that the question was an embarrassing one to him.

"Yes," went on Dudley, as he showed him the directed letter, "it is to the widow of the poor devil who was found in the Thames the other day —man who was once in my late father's employment—Edward Jacobs."

"Oh, yes, I 've heard," stammered Max again.

The incident of Dudley sending money to the woman would have seemed to him trivial and even natural enough, if it had not been for the curious look of hard defiance which Dudley gave him out of his black eyes. It was like a challenge; it set his friend wondering again, asking himself again all those tormenting questions about Edward Jacobs's death which he had allowed to slip into a back place in his thoughts.

As he looked down at the end of the white tablecloth which touched the floor a loud laugh from Dudley startled him and made him look up. And when he did so the conviction that his friend was mad, or, at least, subject to attacks of insanity,

flashed into his mind more strongly than ever. Dudley was leaning back, tilting his chair till it touched the dinner table, distending his jaws in a hard, mocking laugh as unlike mirth as possible.

"Oh, yes, so I've heard—so I've heard!" repeated he, mockingly. "And, of course, that's all you've heard, isn't it? And you've never taken the trouble to make any personal inquiries in the matter? Or thought of taking a journey, say, as far as Plumtree Wharf to make any private investigations?"

Max was startled. He saw clearly enough that which he would fain have denied—that Dudley was in communication with the people at the wharf, from whom he must have obtained this information. For a moment he was silent. It was not until Dudley's harsh laughter had died away, and he, rather surprised to see how quietly Max took his accusation, had wheeled round in his chair to look at his friend, that Max said:

"Well, I did go to the wharf. And I'll tell you why. Doreen is breaking her heart about you, and she would have me find out what was wrong with you."

Then there was silence.

"God bless her!" said Dudley at last, in a hoarse whisper.

Another silence.

"What did you tell her?" whispered Dudley.

"What could I tell her? I said you were mad."

"And what did you—*think?*"

"Well, I hardly know myself."

"That's right! That's the proper attitude!" cried Dudley.

And then he laughed again uproariously.

And in the midst of his laughter there was a knock at the door.

For a moment neither man moved. Then Dudley got up slowly and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him. Max heard him open the outer door, and then he heard a voice he knew—a young girl's voice—say:

"This is Mr. Dudley Horne's place, and you are Mr. Dudley Horne?"

"Yes."

"Then let me come in. I've come from—"

The voice dropped, and Max did not catch the rest.

"Stop! I'll speak to you here," said Dudley, trying to keep her in the little ante-room.

But the girl came straight in. It was Carrie.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SORCERESS.

Max was standing on the other side of the lamp, and Carrie did not see him. She announced her errand at once in a straightforward and matter-of-fact manner.

"Dick Barker's been nabbed for stealing a watch. You 've got to get him off."

"What do you mean? I 've got to get him off?" cried Dudley, indignantly.

Carrie laughed.

"It 's the message I was told to give you; that 's all."

"Well, take this message back: that I refuse to have anything to do with your pickpocket."

Carrie turned to the door.

"All right. I 'm to say that to Mrs. Higgs?"

"Stop!" thundered Dudley.

Carrie paused, with her hand on the door.

"Did Mrs. Higgs send you?"

"Yes."

"Then wait a minute."

All the indignation, all the defiance, had gone from his tone. He looked anxious, haggard.

Carrie sat down like an automaton in the chair nearest to the door.

There was a silence of some minutes' duration when Carrie announced herself as a messenger from Mrs. Higgs.

Dudley, who had either forgotten the presence of Max or was past caring how much his friend learned, since he already knew so much, walked up and down between the fireplace and the bookcase on the opposite wall, evidently debating what he should do. Carrie never once raised her eyes from the carpet, but sat like a statue beside the door, apparently as indifferent as possible as to the message she should take back.

Max had risen from his seat and was standing where he could get a full view of her over the lamp on the dinner-table between them. Perhaps it was the yellow paper shade around the light which made the young girl's face look so ghastly, or the rusty black clothes she wore. A plain skirt, the same that she had worn when he saw her first, a black stuff cape of home-made pattern, and a big black straw hat which had evidently done duty throughout the summer; all were neatly brushed

and clean, but well-worn and lusterless, and they heightened the appearance of deadly pallor which struck Max so much.

Her eyes he could not see ; her scarlet lips were tightly closed, and her face seemed to him to wear an air of dogged determination which helped him to understand how it was that she had escaped the perils of her unprotected girlhood. Certainly it would have taken a good deal of courage, impudence or alcoholic excitement to make a man address to this statuesque and cold-faced creature a flippant word.

She did not see Max, who kept so quiet that it was easy for her to overlook the presence of a third person in the room. He watched her intently, taking even more interest in her under these new conditions than he had done before. Would she retain her cold look and manner when he made his presence known to her, as he intended presently to do? The question was full of interest to him.

Presently Dudley stopped short in his walk, right in front of Carrie, who seemed, however, unconscious of or indifferent to the fact.

"Who are you?" he asked, abruptly.

Carrie looked up and surveyed him as if from a great distance.

"I don't know," she answered, rather quaintly,

but evidently unconscious of the oddity of her own answer. There was a moment's pause, and then she asked, briskly:

"However, that doesn't matter to you, does it?"

"Well, yes, it does. You come here as a messenger. Now, I want to know your credentials."

"I don't know what you mean. I live with Mrs. Higgs. She makes me call her 'Granny.'"

Dudley at once became strongly interested.

"Live with her, do you, and call her Granny? I've never seen you when I have visited Mrs. Higgs."

"I've seen you, though. I've seen—"

She stopped.

Dudley's hand, the one Max could see from where he stood, moved convulsively. After another short pause, Carrie raised her head, and their eyes met. Each evidently saw something oddly interesting in the face of the other.

"I shall have to make some inquiries about you," said he at last.

"Very well. You can go and make them."

Her tone was matter-of-fact, but neither impudent nor defiant. She did not seem to care.

"This Dick Barker, who has been nabbed, as you elegantly express it, is some sweetheart of yours, I suppose? And you have persuaded Mrs. Higgs to

send me this absurd message, asking me to appear for him?"

"No. He's nothing to me. Mrs. Higgs wants him got off, because if he 's convicted he 'll tell all he knows, or at least enough to set the police on."

"And what is that to me?"

Another pause, during which she looked down. Then Carrie raised her eyes again, and looked at him steadily.

"Oh, well, you know best."

Dudley turned away, muttering something under his breath. But the next moment he faced her again.

"And you are waiting to take my answer back?"

"Mrs. Higgs said there would be no answer."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"To see whether there is one or not."

"And you 're going straight back with it to your granny, whatever it is?" asked Dudley, with the same sharp tone of cross-examination.

"No. I am not going back to her. But I shall give the message to some one who is."

There was another pause, longer than any of the previous ones. Then Dudley said, shortly:

"You need not wait here any longer. I am going to see her myself."

Carrie had got upon her feet in the automatic

manner she had maintained throughout the interview.

"Going to the wharf, are you?" she said, with the first sign of human interest she had shown. "Oh, very well."

There was something noticeable in her tone, something which made Max suspicious and anxious on his friend's account. He came round the table with rapid steps, touched Dudley's shoulder, and said, in a low voice:

"I 'll go with you!"

At the sound of his voice Carrie started violently, and looked up at Max, staring with eyes full of wonder and something very like delight. The rigidity with which she had held herself, the automatic manner, the hard, off-hand tone, all disappeared at once; and it was a new, a transformed Carrie, the fascinating, wayward, irresistible girl he had remembered, who gave him a smile and a nod, as she said, in a voice full of the old charm he remembered:

"You! Is it you?" Then, breathlessly, with a change to anxiety in her voice: "And are you going, too?"

"Yes. I'm going with my friend," said Max, as he came forward and held out a hand, into which she put hers very shyly; "from what I remember

of my visit to your place, I think two visitors are better than one."

"I don't know whether granny will think so," said Carrie, still in the same altered voice.

She was shy, modest, charming. All her femininity had returned, and both the young men felt the influence of the change.

Dudley, who had instinctively stepped back to make way for his friend, was watching them both with surprise and uneasiness.

"We must risk Mrs. Higgs's displeasure," said Max, dryly, "unless, indeed, Dudley," and he turned to his friend, "you will give up this expedition altogether, as I strongly advise."

But Dudley had made up his mind. He did not want Max to go with him, but he was resolved to go to the wharf. And his friend's heart failed within him at the news.

"Don't you think it would be advisable to get a policeman to accompany you?" he hazarded in a low voice.

But Dudley started violently at the suggestion.

"Policeman!" repeated he in a louder tone than Max had used. "Good heavens, no!"

Max, looking round, saw that Carrie had overheard; but she betrayed no emotion at the suggestion, even if she felt any.

Dudley pulled out his watch.

"I have an appointment for this evening," said he; "I must get out of it. Max, if you persist in going with me to the wharf, you 're a fool. When your friends are doing well, you should stick to them; when they have got into a mess, you should have appointments elsewhere." Although he spoke cynically, there was underneath his scoffing tone a strain of tenderness. He turned quickly to the girl at this point, as if afraid of betraying more feeling than he had intended to do. "You 've delivered your message," said he, sharply, "now you can go."

But Carrie lingered. Looking shyly at Max, she said in a low voice:

"Have you made up your mind that you will go with him?"

"Yes," said Max.

"All right," nodded Carrie. "Then I 'll go, too."

Dudley looked down at the girl with an impatient frown on his face.

"Supposing we don't want you?" said he, dryly.

"You will," she answered briefly, without even looking at him.

Dudley considered for a moment, and then said shortly:

"All right. We may as well keep an eye on you."

Carrie laughed, and then remained silent. As for

Max, he was struck with an odd likeness between the girl's dry, short manner of speaking to Dudley and Dudley's manner of speaking to her.

At that moment there was an interruption in the shape of the waiter from a neighboring restaurant, who came in with the dinner Dudley had ordered for himself.

"I shan't want it now," said Dudley, as the man put down the covered dishes on the table.

"Why, surely you're not in such a hurry that you haven't time to dine?" said Max.

Dudley made an impatient gesture.

"I can get a biscuit somewhere, if I want it. I can't eat just now."

"Let me eat your dinner for you, then," said Max. "I've had none. And if I'm to go rambling all over the town to look after you, I shall want something to keep me going."

"All right," said Dudley. "I'm to come back here for you, then?"

And he took up his overcoat. Max began to help him on with it.

"Come in here a moment," said Dudley, in the same dry, abrupt manner as before; "I want to speak to you."

Max followed him into the ante-room, and Dudley shut the sitting-room door.

"That girl," said he, with a frown—"where did you pick her up? At the wharf?"

"I met her there. She was walking about outside, afraid to go in. The old woman had left her there alone, with a—a—dead body in the place."

At these words a change came over Dudley's face.

"You had better have left her alone," said he, sharply. "I wonder you hadn't more sense than to take up with a girl like that."

Max fired up indignantly.

"Like what? There's nothing wrong with the girl—nothing whatever. Surely her behavior to-night showed you that."

"Her behavior!" said Dudley, mockingly. "Do you mean her behavior to me, or to you?"

"Both. It was that of a modest, straightforward girl."

"Very straightforward—to me. Very modest to you. But I would not waste too much time over her virtues if I were you."

"I don't want to waste any," replied Max, shortly. "I don't see how we can shake her off, since she has offered to go back to the wharf with us But I shall only be alone with her for the few minutes you leave us here. Or, better still, I'll go with you, and wait while you see your friend."

"What friend?"

"I thought you said you had an appointment with some one, and were going to put him off."

"Oh, yes. Well, let us go to him now."

And Dudley softly opened the outer door.

Max perceived that what he proposed was to give Carrie the slip. He drew back a step.

"We can't go without telling her, at least *I* can't. The girl's quite right. It would be safer for her to go with us. For it's an awful place, not fit to trust oneself in."

"And you think it would be the safer for the presence with us of one of the gang?"

"She is not one of the gang!" cried Max, involuntarily raising his voice. "I'd stake my life on there being no harm in her!"

The door of the sitting-room was opened behind them, and Carrie came out.

"I couldn't help hearing what you said," she said, quietly. "But you needn't quarrel about me. One of you says there's no harm in me; the other says there is. I dare say you're both right. If you don't want me to go to the wharf with you, Mr. Horne, why, I won't go, of course. Good evening."

She wanted to go out, but Dudley stood in the way, preventing her.

"You 're quite wrong, I assure you," said he, quickly. "There has been a little discussion about it, certainly; but I think you and my friend are quite right, and it would be much better if you would go with us—much better. Pray don't be annoyed at anything I 've said. Remember, I have never seen you before, while my friend, who knows you better, naturally appreciates you more."

Carrie maintained an attitude of cold stolidity while Dudley spoke.

"Am I to go with you now, then?" she asked, coldly, when he had finished speaking.

"Well, no, I think not. It will only take me ten minutes to go down into the Strand and put off the fellow I was going to the theatre with. I 'll come back here, and we 'll all go on together."

Carrie looked at him steadfastly while he spoke, and he returned her gaze. For a few moments there was silence, and then it was broken by an exclamation from Max. He was staring first at one and then at the other with a face full of perplexity.

"Do you know," cried he at last, "that when you both look like that, and I turn from one to the other, it is as if I were looking all the time *at the same face?*"

Both Dudley and Carrie looked startled as they withdrew their eyes from each other's face. Then

each sought the eyes of the other again as if it were furtively. Dudley seemed, of the two, the more impressed by his friend's words. He laughed with some constraint.

"Fanciful, very fanciful," said he, mockingly. "What likeness can there be between a girl with a white face, fair hair and blue eyes," and he gave a glance at Carrie which had in it something of fear, "and a man of my type?"

Max looked at him, and then said slowly:

"It 's not in the features, I know; it 's not in the coloring; but it is there, for all that."

"The young lady will not feel flattered," said Dudley, ironically. "I will leave you to make your peace with her, and when I come back, in ten minutes, I expect to find you both ready to start."

He had his hand on the door, when some thought seemed to strike him, and he hesitated and turned to put his hand on the shoulder of Max. Then he swung the young man round in such a way that his own back was turned to Carrie. Looking steadily and with a certain look of affectionate regard into his friend's face, he formed with his lips and eyes a final warning against the girl. Then, with a nod, he went out, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SWORD FALLS.

When Max turned, he found that Carrie had retreated within the door of the sitting-room. He followed her into the room.

"I hope he 'll give us the full ten minutes," said he, "for I had no luncheon to-day, and when I 'm hungry I always get very cross. Is that your experience?"

Carrie looked at the table with a strange smile.

"You ought to know," said she.

His face showed that he had not forgotten.

"Those biscuits!" said he. "I remember. Does your granny treat you better now?"

Carrie's face grew gloomy and cold. And Max noticed that, thin as she had been when he saw her last, she was much thinner now. The outline of her cheek was pathetically pinched, almost sunken.

"No. Worse," she said at last, in a low voice.

"You don't mean that she—*starves* you?"

To his dismay, he saw the tears welling up in

the girl's blue eyes, which looked preternaturally large in her wasted face.

"Pretty nearly," said she.

Max stared at her for about the space of a second; then he went behind her, put his hands lightly on her shoulders and inducted her into the chair Dudley had placed for himself at the dinner-table.

"It is evident," said he, gravely, "that Providence has appointed me purveyor of food to you, for this is the second time, within a comparatively short acquaintance, that I have had the honor of providing you with a repast. This time it 's quite in the manner of 'The Arabian Nights,' isn 't it?"

It was indeed a fairy-tale banquet, this dinner of steak and chip potatoes, followed by *méringues à la crême*, and finishing up with bread and butter and cheese and celery.

There was enough for two, the only drawback being a deficiency of plates, which Max put right, in homely fashion, by eating his share from the dish. Such a tragedy it was to him to find a beautiful girl who was hungry, actually hungry from want of food, that the appetite he had talked so much about failed him, and he found it difficult to eat his share and to keep up the light tone of talk which he judged to be necessary to the situation.

He wanted to ask her a hundred questions about

the people at the wharf and the awful thing which had happened there; but none of these subjects seemed appropriate to the dinner-table, and Max decided to leave them to another and a better opportunity.

In the meanwhile he was getting more forgetful of Dudley's warning every moment. Carrie seemed to guess his feelings, and to be grateful for them. She said very little, but she listened and she laughed, and gave him such pretty, touching glances, such half-mournful, half-merry looks when she thought he was not looking, that by the time they came to the cheese he was in a state of infatuation, in which he forgot to notice what a very long ten minutes Dudley was giving them.

He thought, as he watched Carrie in the lamplight, that he had greatly underrated her attractions on the occasion of their first meeting. She had been so deadly white, so pinched about the cheeks; while now there was a little trace of pink color under the skin; and her blue eyes were bright and sparkling with enjoyment.

And it struck him with a pang that she looked so lovely, so bewitching, because of the change from cold and hunger which, as he knew, and as she had acknowledged, were her usual portion.

"Shall we sit by the fire?" asked he suddenly.

And he jumped up from the table, and turned Dudley's biggest and coziest arm-chair round toward the warmth and the glow.

Carrie hesitated. She rose slowly from her chair, and took up from the side-table, on which Max had placed it, the shabby black cape.

"Oh, you needn't be in such a hurry," said Max. "I dare say he'll be a great deal more than the ten minutes he said he should take."

It was her action which had recalled Dudley to his mind. And, for the first time, as he uttered these words, a doubt sprang up as to his friend's good faith. What if Dudley meant to give them both the slip, and to go off to the wharf by himself, after all?

Carrie's eyes met his; perhaps she guessed what was passing in his mind.

"Oh, yes, he is sure to be longer than that," said she at once; and, putting her cape down again, she took the chair Max had placed for her, while he sat in the opposite one.

"It's beautiful to be warm!" cried she, softly, as she held out her hands to the blaze which Max had made.

Then there was a long pause. Max had so much to say to her that he didn't know where to begin. And in the meantime to sit near her and to watch

the play of the firelight on her happy face was pleasant enough. But presently perceiving that she threw another uneasy glance in the direction of her cape, he broke the silence hastily.

"You said," began he, abruptly, "that you were not going back to the wharf. Where were you going, then?"

"I don't know," said Carrie, after a pause.

Her face had clouded again. Her manner had changed a little also; it had become colder, more reserved.

"Do you mean that—really? Or do you only mean that you don't mean to tell me, that I have no business to ask?"

"I mean just what I said—that I didn't know."

"You are going to leave Mrs. Higgs and her friends, then?" asked Max, in a tone between doubt and hope.

"Yes."

She made this answer rather by a motion of the head than by her voice.

"Well, I am very glad to hear it—very glad."

"Are you? I'm not. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful to lose one's home, any sort of home."

"But could you call that a home? A hole like that? Among people like this Mrs. Higgs and this Dick!"

"Oh, poor Dick! If they had all been like him it would not have mattered."

"What! A pickpocket!" cried Max in disgust.

"What difference did that make? Do you suppose the wives and daughters of the men in the city, financiers and the rest, love them the less because they pass their lives trying to get the better of other people? Isn't it just as dishonest to issue a false prospectus to get people to put their money into worthless companies as to steal a watch? It 's nonsense to pretend it isn't."

Carrie spoke sharply. She had grown warm in defense of her felonious friend.

Max thought a little before he answered.

"But you 're not this man's wife or his daughter."

"Well, no. But he wanted to marry me; and if he hadn't been caught yesterday, perhaps I should have let him."

"What?"

"Don't look so disgusted. He would have been kind to me."

"And *do* you think you couldn't find a better husband than a—than a pickpocket?"

"He would have been honest if I 'd married him," said Carrie, quietly.

"He *says* so, of course; but he wouldn't. A man says anything to get the girl he 's fond of to promise

to marry him. Do you think it 's possible to change the habits of years, of all a man's life, perhaps, like that?"

"I know it would have been possible," persisted she, obstinately. "I know I could have worried him, and nagged at him, and worked for him, till I made him do what I wanted."

And Max saw in her face, as she looked solemnly at the fire, that dogged, steady resolution of the blue-eyed races.

"Well," said he crossly, "then I 'm very glad he 's been caught."

"Ah!" cried she, quickly, "you don't know what it will lead to, though. He knows something, and if your friend, Mr. Horne, won't try to get him off, why, he 'll be sorry."

Max looked worried and thoughtful at this threat.

"I won't believe," said he, stoutly, "that my friend had anything to do with—with what happened at the place. It 's monstrous!—impossible!"

Carrie said nothing.

"Who would believe this pack of thieves against a man like Dudley Horne?"

Carrie laughed cynically.

"Then why is he afraid?"

This indeed was the question which made the

mystery inexplicable. What reason could Dudley have for wishing to hush up the matter unless he himself had brought about Edward Jacobs's violent derth? This was the old, old difficulty in which any discussion of the subject or any meditation on it always landed him.

He got up from his chair and began to walk about the room.

"Why are you leaving Mrs. Higgs?" asked he at last, suddenly.

Max was not without hope that the answer might give him a clue to something more.

"I couldn't bear it any longer. She has been different lately. She has left me alone for days together, and besides—besides—she has been changed, unkind, since Christmas."

Now Max remembered that it was on Christmas Eve that he had met Mrs. Higgs in the barn at The Beeches; and he wondered whether that amiable lady had visited upon Carrie her displeasure on finding that he had escaped alive from the wharf by the docks.

"I believe," said he, suddenly, "that it was your precious Mrs. Higgs that murdered the man. I 'm quite sure she 's capable of it, or of any other villainy."

Carrie leaned forward and looked at him earnestly.

"But what should he want to shelter Mrs. Higgs for, if *she* had done it?"

And to this Max could find no answer.

"And why, if he had nothing to do with the murder, should he be so much afraid of Mrs. Higgs that he steals away by himself to see her when she sends him a message?"

Max sprang up.

"Steals away! By himself!" faltered he.

"Why, yes. Did you really think he would come back? Didn't you know that the ten minutes he spoke of were only a blind, so that he could shake you off, and not make Mrs. Higgs angry by taking another man with him? Surely, surely, you guessed that! Surely, you knew that if the ten minutes had not been an excuse, he would have been back here long ago."

Max felt the blood surging to his head. The girl was right, of course. He leaned against the bookcase, breathing heavily.

"You knew! You guessed! Why didn't you—why didn't you tell me?"

Carrie stood up, as much excited as he was. Her blue eyes flashed, her lips trembled as she spoke.

"What do I care—for him?" she said under her breath. "A man must take the risk of the things he does, mustn't he? But you—you had done

nothing; and—and you have been kind to me. I didn't want you to go. I couldn't let you go. So I tried to keep you. I didn't want you to remember. And it was easy enough."

Max felt a pang of keen self-reproach. Yes, it had been easy enough for a girl with a pretty face to make him forget his friend. He turned quickly toward the door. But Carrie moved even more rapidly, and by the time he reached it she was there before him.

"It's too late now," she said in that deep voice of hers, which, when she was herself moved, was capable of imparting her own emotion to her hearers. "He's been gone an hour. He'll be there by this time. What good could you do him by going? There's an understanding between her and him. He'll be all right. Now *you* would not."

Max stared at the girl in perplexity. She spoke with confidence, with knowledge. A great dread on his friend's account began to creep over him. Why should Dudley be safe where he himself was not, unless he were in league with the old hag? Or, again, was it possible that Carrie—pretty, sweet-faced Carrie—was acting in concert with the gang, detaining him so that Dudley might be an easier prey to her accomplices?

As this suspicion crossed his mind, he, knowing his own weakness, resolved to act without the hesitation which would be fatal to his purpose.

Seizing her by the arm, he drew her almost roughly out of the way, and, opening the door, went out into the ante-room.

But before he could open the outer door, Carrie had overtaken him and seized him by the arm in her turn.

"No, no," said she, passionately. "I will not let you go. You don't know what you are rushing into; you don't know what I do."

"What do you mean?"

"That if you were to go into that house again, you wouldn't leave it alive!"

"All the more reason," said Max, struggling to free himself from the tenacious grasp of her fingers, which were a good deal stronger than he had supposed, "why I should not let him go into such a place alone."

"Well, if you go, you will take me," said Carrie, almost fiercely.

"Come along, then."

He had his hand on the door, when he noticed that she had left her cape in the room.

"Fetch your cloak," said he, shortly.

She hesitated.

"Give me your honor that you won't go without me."

"All right. I 'll wait for you."

She disappeared into the sitting-room, leaving the door open, however. While she was gone, Max, still with his fingers on the handle of the door, heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. It was not Dudley's tread, and, the sound being a common one enough, Max did not pay particular attention to it, and he was surprised when Carrie suddenly thrust forth her head through the sitting-room doorway, with a look of excitement and terror on her face.

"Listen!" said she, in a very low whisper.

"Well, it 's only some one going up the stairs," said he, in a reassuring tone.

Carrie shook her head emphatically.

"Coming, not going," said she. "And it 's a policeman's tread. Don't you know that?"

Max grew rather cold.

"Oh, nonsense!" said he, quickly. "What should—"

She stopped him by a rapid gesture, and at the same moment there was a ring at the bell. For a moment, Max, alarmed by the girl's words, hesitated to open it. Carrie made a rapid gesture to

him to do so, at the same time disappearing herself into the sitting-room.

Max opened the door.

A man in plain clothes stood outside, and at the head of the stairs behind him was a policeman in uniform.

"Mr. Dudley Horne?" said the man.

"These are his rooms, but Mr. Horne is not here."

"You are a friend of his, sir?"

"Yes. My name is Wedmore."

If the man had had a momentary doubt about him, it was by this time dispelled. He stepped inside the door.

"I must have a look round, if you please, sir." Max held his ground. "I have a warrant for Mr. Horne's arrest."

Max staggered back. And the man passed him and went in.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE PAIR.

As Carrie, with her feminine acuteness, had guessed, Dudley Horne had never had any intention of returning to his chambers for her and Max.

On the contrary, he was delighted to have the opportunity of slipping quietly away, and of evading the solicitude of his friend, as well as the society of Carrie herself, of whom he had a strong but not unnatural mistrust.

No sooner did he reach the street than he hailed a hansom and directed the driver to take him to Limehouse, and to lose no time. Then he sat back in the cab, staring at the reins, while the haggard look on his face grew more intense and the eager expression of expectancy and dread of something impending became deeper every moment.

During the last fortnight, Max, having had his thoughts occupied with his own affairs, had not had so much time for the consideration of those of his friend; and he had lost sight altogether of the

theory that Dudley was mad. But if he could have seen Dudley now, with the wild look in his eyes, could have noted the restless movements of his hands, the twitching of his face, the impatience with which he now leaned forward, now back, as if alternately urging the horse forward and holding him back, Max would have felt bound to admit that the case for the young barrister's insanity was very strong.

As soon as the hansom began to thread the narrow streets which lie between Commercial Road and the riverside, Dudley sprang out, paid the man his fare, and walked off at a rapid pace. It was a frosty night, and the ill-clad women who shuffled past him looked pinched and miserable. Even they, with cares enough of their own on their shoulders, turned to look at him as he passed. There was a glare in his black eyes, an uncanny something in his walk, in his look, which made them watch him and wonder who he was, and where he was going to.

But by the time he had reached the riverside street to which his steps were directed, even a chance passer-by was a rarity; and the gas-lamps had become so few and far between that no notice would have been taken of him if the traffic had been greater.

His footsteps echoed in the silent street until he

reached the wooden door which was the entrance by night to Plumtree Wharf.

The door was shut, and Dudley, apparently surprised by the circumstance, gave it an impatient shake. Then he heard a slight sound within which told him of the approach of some living creature, and the next moment the door was opened a few inches, and the face of Mrs. Higgs appeared at the aperture.

She uttered a little mocking laugh when she saw who her visitor was and let him in without any other comment.

Dudley strode in, with a frown of displeasure on his face, and waited under the piles of timber while Mrs. Higgs relocked the door. There was a lamp just outside the wooden boarding which shut the wharf in, and by the light of it Dudley got a good look at the old woman's face before she rejoined him; and it seemed to him that the placid expression she usually wore had given place to a look more sinister, more repellent. She passed him, still without a word, but with a nod which he took for an invitation to him to follow her. They passed through the little wash-house into the inner room, and Mrs. Higgs seated herself by the fire, and gave her visitor another nod to imply that he might be seated also.

But Dudley was not in a friendly mood. He would not even come near the hearth, but remained close to the door by which he had entered, and gave a searching look round the room.

The apartment was so small and so bare that it was not difficult to take stock of its contents, and Mrs. Higgs laughed ironically.

"Isn't the place furnished to your liking?" she asked in a mocking tone. "Are you looking for the sofas and the sideboards and the silver and the plate?"

Dudley cast at the old woman a look which was more eloquent than he knew of hatred and disgust.

"No," said he, shortly. "I was looking to see whether any of your precious pals were about."

Mrs. Higgs drew her chair nearer to the deal table, and leaning on it with her head resting in her hands, stared at him malignantly.

"My precious pals! My precious pals!" muttered she to herself in an angry tone. "That's the way he talks to me! To me, he owes so much to! Ah! Ah! Ah!"

These three last ejaculations were uttered with so much suppressed passion, and there gleamed in her dull eyes such a dull look of stupid ferocity, that Dudley withdrew his attention from the cupboard and walls and transferred it wholly to her.

After a pause, during which the two seemed to measure each other with cautious eyes, he said, abruptly:

"Do you know why I have come here to-night?"

"To show me a little gratitude at last, perhaps," suggested Mrs. Higgs, sharply. "To do your duty—yes, it 's no more than your duty, you know, to do what I tell you—and to help yourself in helping me. That 's true, isn't it?"

Dudley stared at her in silence for a few moments before he answered:

"Duty is an odd word to use—a very odd word. But we won't waste time discussing that. You sent a message to me by a girl this evening?"

Mrs. Higgs nodded.

"You want me to defend one of the rascals who make this place their hole, their den?"

Again Mrs. Higgs signified assent.

"Well, I shall do nothing of the kind. I have done more than enough for you already. I have offered you the means of taking yourself off and of living like a decent creature. I have done everything you could expect, and more. But I will not be mixed up with you and the gang you choose to make your friends; and I will not lift a finger to save your friend the pickpocket from the punishment he deserves."

Dudley spoke with decision, but he made no impression worth speaking of upon his hearer. She continued to look at him with the same expression of dull malignity; and when she spoke, it was without vehemence.

"Well," she began, leaning forward a little more and keeping her eyes fixed upon him, "perhaps you won't have the chance of defending anybody long. There's been a woman about here lately, making inquiries and hunting about, and one of these fine days she may light upon something that 'll put her upon your track."

"What do you mean? Whom do you mean?"

"Why, Edward Jacobs's widow, of course. She had an idea where to look, you see."

Dudley could not hide the fact that he was much disturbed by this intelligence.

"Poor woman! Poor woman! Who can blame her?" said he at last, more to himself than to Mrs. Higgs, "I've done what I could for her, sent her money every week since—"

To his amazement, Mrs. Higgs suddenly interrupted him, bringing her fist down upon the table with a sounding thump.

"You fool!" screamed she. "You—fool! You've given yourself away! You deserve all you 'll certainly get! Do you suppose a Jewess wouldn't

have wits enough to trace you by that? By the fact that you sent her money?"

"But I sent it anonymously," said Dudley.

"That doesn't matter. Money? Postal-orders, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, they can be traced. Oh, you fool, you wooden-headed fool!"

There was a pause. Mrs. Higgs appeared to have exhausted herself in vituperation, while Dudley considered this new aspect of the affair in silence.

"Well," said he at last, "if she does trace me, who will be the sufferer, do you suppose—you or I?"

"Why, you, you, you, of course!" retorted the old woman with heat. "You will be hanged, while I can bury myself like a mole in the ground and be forgotten, lost sight of altogether."

She said this with unctuous satisfaction, and Dudley gave her a glance of horror.

"And what particular pleasure will it give you, even supposing such an outcome possible, to see me hanged?"

The old woman's indecent delight faded gradually from her face as she looked at him. Then she rose slowly from her chair and came a step nearer to Dudley, who instinctively recoiled from

the threatened touch. She noticed this movement, and resented it fiercely.

"Why do you go back? Why do you want to get away? Always to get away?" she asked, angrily. "That 's what makes me so mad! Why do you try to get out of the business in the way you do? Sneaking out of it, as if it had nothing to do with you? Why don't you throw in your lot with me and go away with me, as I wished you to, as you once were ready to do?"

Dudley looked searchingly into the wrinkled face.

"I was never ready to go," said he. "I did affect to be ready. I was ready to go as far as Liverpool with you, to get you safely out of the country, out of danger to me and to yourself. But I should never have gone farther than that. I never meant to. I would run any risk rather than that."

Mr. Higgs never blinked. Staring steadily up into his face, with a malignity more pronounced than ever, she asked, in a mocking tone:

"Why? Why?"

Dudley was silent.

Mrs. Higgs laughed, and shook her head with a look of unspeakable cunning.

"You needn't answer," said she, dryly, "for I know the reason. You won't leave England because of a girl."

Dudley did not start, but the quiver which passed over his features betrayed him.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mrs. Higgs. "It's not much use telling me a fib when I want to know anything. You wouldn't own up, so I went ferreting on my own account, and I found out what I wanted. You 're in love with a girl named Wedmore—Doreen Wedmore—and it 's on her account that you won't leave England, and throw in your lot with me, like a man!"

Dudley's face had grown gray with fear. When he spoke it was in a changed tone. He had lost his confidence, his defiant robustness. He almost seemed to be begging for mercy, as he answered:

"I don't deny it. I don't deny anything. I did care for a girl; I do now. But I have given her up. I was bound to, with this ghastly business hanging to my heels. I shall never see her again."

Mrs. Higgs cut in with decision:

"No, that you won't. I 'll answer for it!"

Dudley looked at her, but did not dare to speak. There was something in the spiteful tones of her voice, when she mentioned Doreen, which filled him with vague dread. It was in a subdued and conciliatory voice that he presently tried to turn the conversation to another subject.

"Who was the girl you sent this evening, the girl who brought your message?"

"Nobody of any consequence," answered Mrs. Higgs, as if the subject was not to her taste. "A girl who lives here. We call her Carrie."

"And her other name?"

His tone betrayed his suspicions. Mrs. Higgs shrugged her shoulders.

"What does that matter to you? She is your half-sister, but I don't suppose you wish to claim relationship?"

"Does she know—anything?"

"Something, perhaps. Not too much, I think. But it doesn't matter. She is a weak, namby-pamby creature, and I'm sick of the sight of her white face. So I've got rid of her."

"How?"

"I've given her notice to quit. I don't expect her back again."

"And aren't you afraid that she may give information?"

"Ah! Your solicitude is for yourself, eh? No, she'll hold her tongue for her own sake." And Mrs. Higgs's features relaxed into a menacing grin. "She's seen enough of me to know she must be careful!"

Dudley moved restlessly.

"Isn't it rough on the girl to bring her up like this? In this hole, among these human vermin? She seems to have some decent instincts."

Mrs. Higgs frowned.

"She was brought up as well as she had any right to expect," said she, shortly; "educated fairly well into the bargain. She has not had much to complain of."

Dudley made no answer to this for some minutes, and during this time Mrs. Higgs kept him steadily under observation, not a movement of his hands, a change of his expression, escaping her. At last he looked at her, and seemed to be struck by something in her face. He put his fingers upon the handle of the door as he turned to go.

"Well," said he—his voice sounded hollow, cold—"I have said what I came to say. I need not stay here any longer. I don't wish to meet any of your friends."

Mr. Higgs got slowly to her feet.

"My friends!" cried she, angrily. "My friends! They 've done you no harm, at any rate; while your friends come spying round the place, poking their noses into business which is none of theirs."

Dudley's hand dropped to his side.

"Do you mean Max Wedmore?" said he, earnestly. "Why, he is the son of the man who has

been a father to me, who brought me up, who saved me from becoming the outcast that poor girl is—"

Mrs. Higgs interrupted him fiercely.

"That 'll do. I 'm sick of the very name of Wedmore. They 've had their own interests to serve, whatever they 've done, depend upon it. And if he comes fooling round here again, I 'll treat him as you—"

Dudley broke in sharply, stopping her as her voice was growing loud and her gestures threatening. After a short pause, during which she watched him as keenly as ever, he asked, in a hoarse whisper:

"What did you do with—*him?* Did anybody help you—any of your friends here? Or did you—"

Mrs. Higgs cut him short with an ugly laugh. At the mention of the dead man her face had changed, and a strange gleam of mingled cunning and ferocity came into her small, light eyes.

"Come and see—come and see," mumbled she, as she took up the candlestick from the table and shuffled across the room to the door which opened into the disused shop.

Dudley hesitated a moment; indeed, he glanced at the door by which he stood as if he felt inclined to make his escape without further delay. But

Mrs. Higgs, slow as she seemed, turned quickly enough to divine his purpose.

"No," said she, sharply, "not that way. This!"

Seizing him by the arm, she thrust a key into the lock of the door with her other hand, and half led, half pushed him into the dark front room.

Dudley was seized with a nervous tremor when he found himself inside the room. By the light of the candle the woman held, he could see at a glance into every corner of the bare, squalid apartment—could see the stains on the dirty walls, the cracks and defects in the dilapidated ceiling, even the thick clusters of cobwebs that hung in the corners. Having taken in all these details in a very rapid survey, he looked down at the floor, at the very center of the bare, grimy boards, with a fixed stare of horror which the old woman, by passing the candle rapidly backward and forward before his eyes, tried vainly to divert.

Even she, however, seemed to be impressed by the hideous memory the room called up in her, for she spoke, not in her usual gruffly indifferent tones, but in a husky whisper.

"Tst—tst!" she began, testily. "Haven't you got over that yet? One Jew the less in the world! What is it to trouble about? Be a man—come, be a man! See, this is how I got rid of him."

As she spoke, Mrs. Higgs suddenly dropped Dudley's arm, which she had been clutching tenaciously, and hobbling away from him at an unusual rate of speed for her, she went back to the door, turned the key in the lock, and then withdrew it and dropped it into her pocket. This action Dudley was too much absorbed to notice.

Then she made her way at her usual pace, leaning heavily on the stout stick she was never without, toward the corner where the heap of lumber lay, on the left-hand side of what had once been the fireplace. Here she stooped, lifted a couple of bricks and a broken box-lid from the floor, and then easily raised the board on which they had stood, and beckoned to Dudley to come nearer. He did so, slowly, and with evident reluctance.

"Look here," said she, pointing down to the space where the board had been. "Look down. Don't be afraid," she added, in a jeering tone. "There's nothing there to frighten you. See for yourself."

Dudley stooped, and looking through the small opening available, saw that there was a space hollowed out underneath.

"And you put him there—under the boards?" said Dudley, in a low voice. "But it was in the water that the body was found—in the river outside."

"Why, yes, so it was," said the old woman, slowly, as she lifted the board out of its place altogether, and displacing also the one next to it, descended through the opening she had made.

Dudley watched her with fascinated eyes. Apparently the space below was not very deep, for she had only disappeared as far as the knees downward, and then knelt down, and for a moment was lost to sight altogether. She appeared to be struggling with something, and Dudley, consumed with horror, took a step back as he watched.

Presently she looked up. Her face was in shadow, but he could see that she was panting, as if with some great exertion.

"Get back! Stand in the middle of the room there, if you 're afraid," said she, mockingly. "Right out of my reach, mind, where I can't get at you."

Instinctively Dudley obeyed, stepping back into the little patch of light thrown by the candle.

He had scarcely reached the middle of the room when he felt the boards under his feet give way. Staggering, he tried to retrace his steps, to reach the end of the room where the old woman, now again on a level with him, was watching him in silence.

But as he moved towards her she made a spring

at him, and forcing him back with so much suddenness that he, quite unprepared, was unable to resist her attack, she flung him to the ground in the very middle of the room.

As he fell he felt the flooring give way under him. The next moment he was struggling, like a rat in a well, in deep water.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PREY OF THE RIVER.

"Help! Help!" shouted Dudley. "Do you want to drown me?"

Great as the shock was of finding himself flung suddenly into what he supposed was a flooded cellar, Dudley did not at first believe that the old woman had any worse intention than that of playing him an ugly and malicious trick.

But as he uttered this question he looked up, and saw her face half a dozen feet above him, wearing an expression of fiendish malignity which froze his blood.

She was holding the candle so that she might see his face, and as he kept himself afloat in the small

space available—for he had no room to strike out, and no foothold on the slimy earthen sides—he began to understand that she was in grim, deadly earnest, and that the place where the dead body of Edward Jacobs had been concealed was to be his own grave.

Then he did not cry out. He saw that he would only be wasting his breath; that there was no mercy in the hard-light eyes, in the lines of the wicked, wrinkled mouth.

He made a struggle to climb up one side of the pit in which he found himself; but the soft earth, slimy with damp, slipped and gave way under him. He tore out a hole with his fingers, then another, and another above that. And all the while she watched him without a word, apparently without a movement.

But just as he came to a point in his ascent from which he might hope to make a spring for the top, she raised her thick stick and dealt him a blow on the head which sent him, with a splash and a gurgling cry, back into the water.

He saw strange lights dancing before his eyes. He heard weird noises thundering in his ears, and above them all a chuckling laugh, like the merriment of a demon, as the boards of the displaced flooring were drawn slowly up by a cord from

above until they closed over his head, shutting him down.

* * * * * *

When the police made their descent upon Dudley's chambers, Max, after giving his name and address, was allowed to go away without hindrance.

He wanted Carrie to go with him, but as she persistently held down her head and refused to look at him, he came to the conclusion that she had her own reasons for wishing him to go away without her.

So he went slowly down into the Strand, wondering whether he dared to go to the wharf to try to warn Dudley, or whether he would be drawing down danger upon his friend's head by doing so. For although he could not ascertain that he was himself shadowed, he thought that it might very possibly be the case.

He had reached the corner of Arundel Street, when he found that Carrie was beside him. She was panting, out of breath.

"Hello!" said he.

"I've been such a round!" said she. "Just to see whether they were following me. But they weren't. I guessed you'd come this way, and I went down by the embankment and up to try to meet you. Are they after you?"

"I don't think so. Dare we—"

"Wharf? Yes, I think we may. By the way, I'll show you."

She took him across Waterloo Bridge, where they took a cab and traversed southward to a point at which she directed the driver to stop.

On the way, Max, from his corner of the hansom, watched the girl furtively. For a long time there was absolute silence between them. Then he came close to her suddenly, and peered into her face.

"Carrie," said he, "I want you to marry me."

Now Max had been some time making up his mind to put this proposition—some minutes, that is to say. He had been turning the matter over in his brain, and had imagined the blushing, trembling astonishment with which the lonely girl would receive his most unexpected proposal.

But the astonishment was on his side, not on hers; for Carrie only turned her head a little, scarcely looking at him and staring out again in front of her immediately, remarked in the coolest manner in the world:

"Marry you! Oh, yes, certainly. Why not?"

Max was taken aback, and Carrie, at last stealing a glance at him, perceived this. She gave a pretty little kindly laugh, which made him expect that

she would say something more tender, more encouraging.

But she didn't.

Turning her head away again, she went on quietly laughing to herself, until Max, not unnaturally irritated by this acceptance of his offer, threw himself back in his corner and tried to laugh also.

"It 's a very good joke, isn't it—an offer of marriage?" said he at last, in an offended tone.

"Very," assented Carrie at once. "About the best I ever heard."

And she went on laughing.

"And I suppose," went on Max, unable to hide his annoyance, "that if I were to tell you it was not a joke at all, but that I spoke in downright earnest, you would laugh still more?"

"Well, I think I should."

"Well, laugh away, then. I was in earnest. I meant what I said. I was idiot enough to suppose you might find marrying me a better alternative than wandering about without any home. Extraordinary, wasn't it?"

"Well," answered Carrie, subduing her mirth a little and speaking in that deep-toned voice she unconsciously used when she was moved—the voice which Max found in itself so moving—"I

should say it was extraordinary, if I didn't know you."

"If you didn't know me for an idiot, I suppose you mean," said Max, coldly, with much irritation.

"Not quite that," replied she, in the same tone as before. "I meant if I hadn't known you to be one of those good-natured people who speak before they think."

Max sat up angrily.

"I have not spoken without thinking," said he, quickly. "I have done nothing but think of you ever since I first saw you; and my asking you to marry me is the outcome of my thinking."

"Well, if I were you, I should think to better purpose than that."

Her tone was rather puzzling to Max. There was mockery in it; but there was something more. He came to the conclusion, after a moment's consideration of it, and of the little that he could see of her face, that she felt more than she chose to show. So he put his arm around her and caught one of her hands.

"Look here, Carrie," said he in a whisper. "I understand you. I know how you feel. I know you think it 's neither decent nor wise to ask a girl to be your wife when you 've only seen her twice. But just consider the circumstances. If I don't get

you to say what I want you to say now, I shall lose sight of you to-night and never see you again. Now, I couldn't bear that—I couldn't, Carrie. I never saw a girl like you; I never met one who made me feel as you make me feel. And you like me, too. You wouldn't have troubled yourself about my going to the wharf if you hadn't cared. It's no use denying that you like me."

Carrie turned upon him with energy.

"Well, I don't deny it, if you care to hear that," said she, quickly. "I do like you. How could I help it? I liked you the moment I first saw you; I shouldn't have spoken to you if I hadn't; I should have been afraid. But what difference does that make? Do you think I 'm a fool? Do you think I don't know that this feeling you have—and I believe in it, mind—is just because I 'm a new sensation to you, who are a spoiled child—nothing more nor less. Oh, don't let 's talk about it; it 's silly."

She had wrenched herself impatiently away from him, and now sat upright, frowning and looking straight in front of her as before.

Max, not finally rebuffed, but rather puzzled what to make of this form of repulse, was silent for a few moments.

"Well, if you won't let me talk about that," he

said at last, "will you promise to let me know where you are going to, so that I shan't have to lose sight of you? Come, you like me well enough to agree to that, don't you?"

Carrie hesitated.

"I told you," she said at last, in a low voice, "that I didn't know myself where I was going. Have you forgotten that?"

"But it wasn't true. You said it to put me off. You must know!"

"Well, I shan't tell you. There!"

"Why?"

"Because it would be the beginning of what I don't want and won't have. Because you'd come and see me, and I shouldn't have the heart to say you mustn't come; and in the end, if you persisted, I shouldn't have the heart to stop you from making a fool of yourself."

"How, making a fool of myself?"

"Why, by marrying me. Now don't pretend you don't know it's true. Marrying me would be just ruin—ruin! Oh, I know! What would your family say, and be right in saying? That you'd been got hold of by a girl nobody knew anything about, without any parents or friends, and who came from nobody knew where."

"Ah, but when they knew you—"

"They'd think less of me than they did before."

"Nonsense! When they saw how beautiful you are and well educated and refined, they wouldn't believe you came from such a place as Limehouse."

Carrie smiled.

"I seem refined to you, because you didn't expect much where you found me. Put me beside your sisters and their friends, and I should be shy and awkward enough. No, I will not listen, and I want you to tell the driver to stop here."

Whether this was the point she had proposed to reach or whether she wanted to cut short the subject, Max could not tell. But as the hansom stopped she sprang out and led the way hurriedly in the direction of the river. She knew her way about on this side of the river as well as on the other, for she went straight to the water's edge, got into a boat which was moored there with a dozen others, and, with a nod to a man with a pipe in his mouth who was loafing near the spot, she directed Max to jump in, and seized one oar while he took the other.

"If we go from this side," she said, "we can make sure we're not followed, at all events."

In the darkness they began to row across the river, where the traffic had practically ceased for the night.

Threading their way between the barges, the great steam traders, with their ugly square hulks standing high out of the water, and the lesser craft that clustered about the larger like a swarm of bees round the hive, they came out upon the gray stream, slowly leaving behind one dim shore, with its gloomy wharves and warehouses, and nearing the other. The London lights looked dim and blurred through the mist.

As they drew near the wharf, Carrie jerked her head in the direction of the little ugly cluster of buildings which Max remembered so well.

"There 's a passage under there," she said in a whisper, leaning forward on her oar, "through which they let the dead body of the man—you know—out into the river. It 's just near here."

Max shuddered, and at the same moment there burst from the girl's lips a hoarse cry.

Max turned sharply, and saw that she was staring down into the water.

"Look! Look there!" whispered she, gasping, trembling.

"What is it?" cried he.

But even as he asked, he knew that the dark object he saw floating in the water was the body of a man.

By a dexterous movement of her oar, Carrie had

brought the boat alongside the black mass, and then, with the boat-hook, which she used with an evidently practiced hand, she drew the body close.

Max, sick with horror, leaned over just as Carrie's exertion's brought the face of the man to view.

"He's dead!" cried he, hoarsely. "It's another murder by those vile wretches in there!"

An exclamation burst from the girl's lips.

"Look at him! Look at his face! Who is he?" whispered she, with trembling lips.

Max looked, putting his hand under the head and lifting it out of the water.

Then, with a great shout, he tore at the body, clutching it, trying to drag it into the boat.

"Great Heaven! It's Dudley!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DUBIOUS REFUGE.

The night was clammy and cold. The fog was growing thicker, blacker. And the water of the Thames, as Max plunged his hand into it, struggling to raise the body of his friend, was ice-cold to the touch.

Carrie had seized her oar again, and was bringing the boat's head rapidly round, right under the stern of a barge which was moored close to Plumtree Wharf.

"Hold him; don't let him go!" cried she, imperiously. "But don't try to drag him into the boat until I get her alongside. You can't do it without help. And if you could you'd pull the boat over."

The caution was necessary. Max had lost his head, and was making frantic efforts to raise the body of his friend over the boat's side.

"But he may be alive still! And if there's a chance—oh, if there's the least chance—"

"There 'll be none if you don't do as I tell you!" cried Carrie, tartly.

By this time a lad on board the barge was looking over the side at them, not seeing much, however, in the gloom. Carrie whistled twice.

"Hello!" replied he, evidently recognizing a signal he was used to.

"Is that Bob?"

"Yes."

"Lower a rope, and hold on like a man, Bob. We 've got a man here drowned or half-drowned; and we want to get him on the wharf in a twinkling."

"Right you are."

The next moment the lad had lowered a rope over the side of the barge, and Carrie directed Max to pass it round the body of his friend. Then, she giving the orders as before, Bob from the barge above and Max from the boat below raised the body out of the water. Carrie had brought the little boat close to the barge, and held it in place with the boat-hook until the difficult task was safely accomplished, and the body of Dudley Horne laid upon the deck of the barge.

"Now," said she to Max, "get up and help Bob to carry him ashore."

Max, who was speechless with grief and as help-

less as a child in these new and strange circumstances, obeyed her docilely, and climbed to the deck of the barge.

"Now, Bob," went on Carrie, as she seized the second oar and prepared to row away, "carry him into the kitchen—you know your way—as fast as you can. And lay him down before the fire, if there is a fire; if not, make one. Sharp 's the word, mind!"

"All right, missus."

Max looked down. Already she had disappeared in the gloom, and only the muffled sound of the oars as they dripped on the water told him that she had not yet gone far away.

Suddenly he felt a rough pull at his arm.

"Come on, mister!" cried Bob, briskly. "She said, 'Sharp is the word.' And when she says a thing she means it, you bet your life."

Max pulled himself together and turned quickly, ashamed of his own lack of vigor in the face of Carrie's intelligence and energy. Bob and he raised the body of Dudley and carried it across the plank to the wharf, where Bob, who knew his way about there, led the way to the door which Max remembered so well.

It was open, and they passed through the outhouse, meeting no one, to the kitchen, which was

was also deserted. There they laid Dudley on the hearth, as Carrie had directed, and Bob proceeded to rake up the fire, which had died down to a few embers.

Meanwhile Max had taken off some of Dudley's clothes, and began to apply friction with his hands to the inanimate body. He had scarcely begun, when Carrie came in with an armful of dry towels and a couple of pillows.

"He is dead, quite dead!" cried Max, hoarsely.

Carrie never even looked at him. Placing herself at once on her knees behind Dudley's head, she curtly directed Max to raise the upper part of his body, and slipped the two pillows, one on the top of the other, under the shoulders of the unconscious man.

"Now," said she, "go on with your rubbing—rub with all your might; and you, Bob, bring in a couple of big stone-bottles you 'll find in the wash-house, fill them with hot water from the boiler, wrap them up in something, and put one to his feet and the other to the side that 's away from the fire."

While she spoke she was working hard in the endeavor to restore respiration, alternately drawing Dudley's arms up above his head and laying them against his sides, with firm and steady movements.

For a long time all their efforts seemed to be useless. Max, indeed, had little or no hope from the first. He still worked on, however, perseveringly, but with despair in his heart, until he heard a sharp sound, like a deep sigh, from Carrie's lips.

She had detected a movement, the slightest in the world, but still a movement, in the senseless body. With straining eyes she now watched, that her own movements might coincide with the natural ones which Dudley had begun to make, and that real breathing might gradually take the place of the artificial.

"Let me do it. Let me help you," cried Max, who saw the strained look of utter fatigue which Carrie wore in spite of her excitement.

"No, no; I dare not. I must go on!" cried the girl, without lifting her eyes.

And presently another cry escaped her lips, a cry of joy.

"He is alive!"

"Thank God!"

The tears sprang to the eyes of Max. It was more than he had hoped.

"A doctor! Shall I fetch a doctor?" said he

Carrie shook her head.

"A doctor could do no more than we 've done," said she. "He 'll be all right now—well enough to

be got away, at all events. And the wound on his head isn't much, I think."

"Wound on his head!"

"Yes. It saved his life, most likely. Preverted his getting so much water into his lungs. Stunned him, you see."

Something like a sigh from the patient stopped her and directed the attention of them all to him. Bob, who had been standing in the background, almost as much excited as the others, came a few steps nearer. There was a moment of intense, eager expectancy, and then Dudley half opened his eyes.

Max uttered a deep sob and glanced at Carrie. She was deadly pale, and the tears were standing in her eyes.

"You 've saved him!" said Max, hoarsely.

The sound of his voice seemed to rouse Dudley, who looked at him with a vacant stare, and then let his eyelids drop again.

"So glad, old chap—so glad to—to see you yourself again!" whispered Max, huskily.

But Dudley was not himself. He looked up again, then tried to smile, and at last turned his head abruptly and seemed to be listening.

Carrie beckoned to Max and spoke low in his ear.

"You 'd better take him away from here as quickly as you can, for half a dozen reasons."

Max nodded, but looked doubtful.

"He 's ill," said he. "How shall I get him away? And where shall I take him to?"

"Down to your father's house" answered she at once.

Max looked rather startled.

"But—you know—the police!" muttered he, almost inaudibly. "Won't that be the very first place they'd come to—my home?"

"Never mind that. You must risk it. He 's going to be ill, I think, and he can't be left here. Surely you know that."

She gave a glance round which made Max shiver.

"And how am I to get him all that way to-night? The last train has gone hours ago."

"Take him by road, then. We 'll get a carriage —a conveyance of some sort or other—at once. I 'll send Bob."

She turned to the lad and gave him some directions, in obedience to which he disappeared. Then she turned fiercely to Max.

"Don't you see," said she, "that if he wakes up and finds himself here, after what 's happened, it 'll about settle him?"

The words sent a shudder through Max.

"After what 's happened!" repeated he, with

stammering tongue. "What was it? Who did it?"

But, instead of answering, Carrie threw herself down beside Dudley, who was now rapidly recovering strength, although he hardly seemed to understand where he was or by whom he was being tended.

"Do you feel all right now?" she asked, cheerfully.

He looked at her with dull eyes.

"Oh, yes," said he. "But I—I don't remember what—"

"Take a drink of this," interrupted Carrie, quickly, as she put to his lips a flask of brandy which Bob had fetched. "You've got to take a long drive, and you want something to warm you first."

"A drive! A long drive!"

Dudley repeated the words as if he hardly understood their meaning. But he was not satisfied, and as he sipped the brandy he looked at her curiously. His next words, however, were a criticism on the restorative.

"What vile stuff!"

"Never mind. It's better than nothing. Try a little more."

But instead of obeying, he looked her steadily in the face.

"Where did I see you? I remember your face!" said he. "And who was that I heard talking just now?"

Suddenly, without any warning, he disengaged one hand from the hot towels in which he was swathed and sat up. A hoarse cry broke from his lips as full recognition of the place in which he found himself forced itself upon him. With a wild light of terror in his eyes, he looked searchingly round him.

"Where is he? Where is he?" cried he, in a thick whisper.

Carrie's face grew dark.

"Here is your friend," she cried cheerily, "here is Mr. Wedmore. He's going with you; he's not going to leave you; be sure of that."

"Yes, old chap, I'm going with you," said Max, hurrying forward and trying to shut out the view of the room with his person as he knelt down by his friend.

Dudley frowned impatiently.

"You, Max!" said he. "What are you doing here?"

But he asked the question without interest, evidently absorbed in another subject.

"I'm going to take you down to The Beeches," answered Max, promptly.

To his infinite satisfaction, this reply had the effect of distracting Dudley's thoughts. Into his pallid face there came a tinge of color, as he looked intently into his friend's eyes, and repeated:

"The Beeches! You don't mean that!"

"I do; the carriage will be here in a minute or two. And in the meantime we must think upon getting you dressed."

This question of clothing promised to be a difficult one, as Dudley's own things were saturated with water. Carrie sprang to her feet.

"I'll see about that," said she, briskly, as she disappeared from the room.

Max, alarmed at being left alone with Dudley, in whose eyes he could see the dawn of struggling recollection, babbled on about Christmas, his mother, his sisters, anything he could think of till Carrie came back again, with her arms full of men's clothes—a motley assortment.

Max looked at them doubtfully. They were all new—suspiciously new.

Carrie laughed, with a little blush.

"Better not ask any questions about them, said she. "Take your choice, and be quick."

With his lips Max formed the word: "Stolen?" but Carrie declined to answer. As there was no help for it, Max dressed his friend in such of the

clothes as were a passable fit for him, while Carrie went out to watch for the expected carriage. When she returned to the kitchen, Dudley was ready for the journey. He was lying back in a chair, looking very white and haggard and exhausted, casting about him glances full of expectancy and terror, and starting at every sound.

But he asked no more questions, and he made no mention of Mrs. Higgs.

Bob had fulfilled his errand well. Outside the wharf they found a comfortable landau, with two good horses, hired from the nearest livery-stable.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO WOMEN.

Bob grinned with satisfaction when Max, expressing his gratification, dropped into his hand a half-sovereign.

"Thought you'd be pleased, sir," said he, as he helped to get Dudley into the carriage. "I said it was for a toff, a reg'lar tip-topper; and so it was, s' help me!"

Dudley, who was very lame, and who had to be more than half carried, looked out of the window.

Max was still outside, trying to get hold of Carrie, who was on the other side of the carriage.

"You 're coming, Max?"

"Yes, oh, yes, rather."

"And—you?"

Dudley turned to Carrie, who drew back quickly and shook her head.

"I? No."

Max ran round at the back of the carriage and

caught her by the arm as she was slinking quietly away.

"Where are you going? Not back in there? You must come with us."

"I!—come with you? To your father's house? Catch me!"

"Well, part of the way, at any rate," urged Max, astutely. "I dare not go all that way with him alone. See, he wants you to go. You shall get out just when you please."

Carrie hesitated. Although she saw through the kindly ruse which would protect her against her will, she saw, also, that Dudley was indeed in no fit state to take the long journey which was before him, and at lenght she allowed herself to be persuaded to accompany them on at least the first part of the journey.

And so, in the fog and the gloom of a January night, they began their strange drive.

The road they took was by way of Greenwich and Dartford to Chatham, where there would be no difficulty in getting fresh horses for the rest of the journey.

Dudley, who had been made as comfortable as possible by a sort of bed which was made up for him in the roomy carriage, seemed, after a short period of restlessness and excitability, to sink into sleep.

Max was rejoicing in this, but Carrie looked anxious.

"It isn't natural, healthy sleep, I 'm afraid," said she, in a low voice. "It 's more like stupor. It wasn't the water that did it, it was a blow on the head. You saw the mark. I 'm afraid it 's concussion of the brain."

"Ought he to travel, then?" asked Max, anxiously.

Carrie, who was sitting beside Dudley, and opposite to Max, hesitated a little before answering:

"What else could we do? We couldn't leave him there at the wharf, could we? And where else could we have taken him? Not back to his chambers, certainly!"

There was silence. The carriage jogged on in the darkness through London's ugly outskirts, and the two watchers listened solicitously to the heavy breathing of their patient. It was a comfort to Max, a great one indeed, to have Carrie for a companion on this doleful journey. But she was not the same girl, now that she had duties to attend to, that she had been over that *tête-à-tête* dinner, or even during the journey in the hansom. He himself felt that he now counted for nothing with her, that he was merely the individual who happened to occupy the opposite seat; that her interest, her at-

tentions, were absorbed by the unconscious man by her side.

"Why didn't you become a hospital nurse?" asked Max, suddenly.

He heard rather than saw that she started.

"That's just what I thought of doing," she answered, after a little pause. "I 'm just old enough to enter one of the Children's Hospitals as a probationer. They take them at twenty."

"I see. Then you couldn't have tried before."

"No; they 're very strict about age."

"I should think you were cut out for the work, if only you are strong enough," said Max, with warmth. "You seem to do just the right thing in just the right way."

"I 've had plenty of experience," said Carrie, shortly, breaking in upon rhapsodies which threatened to become tender. "I did a lot of visiting among poor people who had no one to nurse them when I lived with Miss Aldridge. Down in these parts, the East End, you get practice enough like that, I can tell you!"

"But the treatment of a drowning man—that requires special knowledge, surely!"

"Yes, but down by the river is just the place to get it. He 's the fifth person I 've seen taken out

for dead in the time I 've lived there. Three out of the five were dead. The other two, a boy and a woman, were brought around."

There was silence again.

Presently Max whispered :

" Do you know—can you guess—how he got into the water ?"

Carrie shivered.

" Wait—wait till he can tell us himself," said she, hurriedly. " It 's no use guessing. Perhaps it was an accident, you know."

" You don't think so ?"

" Sh—sh !" said Carrie.

But Max persisted.

" You know as well as I do that that villainous old Mrs. Higgs is at the bottom of the affair."

Carrie bent over Dudley, to assure herself that, if not asleep, he was at least unconscious of what was passing. Then she turned to Max.

" You are wrong," said she then, quickly. " Mrs. Higgs was an agent only, in the hands of some one else. If I tell you what I believe, you will only laugh at me."

" What do you mean ?"

" I mean that she was a harmless, good-hearted, kind woman until—until Mr. Horne came to see her ; that she was always good to me till then.

And that, after that awful day when the man was killed—murdered by Mr. Horne—"

"It's not true! It can't be true!" burst out Max.

But Carrie went on, as if he had not spoken:

"After that day she changed; she was irritable, unkind, neglectful—not like the same woman. She left me alone sometimes; she gave me no food at others; she hid herself away from me; she was angry at the least thing. And then—then," went on the girl, in a frightful whisper, "I found out something,"

"What was it?"

"That some one used to get into the place at night—I don't know how; some one she was afraid of—a man."

"Well?" said Max, excited by her tone.

"I have heard him—seen him twice," went on Carrie, in the lowest of whispers. "And I believe—"

"Yes, yes; go on!"

"That it was Mr. Dudley Horne."

"Oh, rubbish!"

Carrie was silent. Max went on, indignantly:

"How could you take such a silly idea into your head? What reason should Mr. Horne have for creeping about a hole like that at night?"

"Well, what reason should he have for coming

to it at any time? Yet you know he came in the daytime."

It was the turn of Max to remain silent. There was a long pause, and then Carrie went on:

"I used to sleep in a little attic over the outhouse, just a corner of the roof it was. And twice at night I have heard a noise underneath, and looked through the cracks in the boards and seen a man down there, with a light. And each time, when the light was put out and the noise had stopped, I have gone downstairs and found the doors bolted still on the inside."

"Well, the place seems to be honeycombed with ways in and ways out. The strange man either went out by some way even you knew nothing about, or else Mrs. Higgs let him out."

"No, she didn't. I should have heard or seen her."

"Well, but what reason can you have for supposing that this man was Mr. Dudley Horne?"

"Once I saw his face," answered Carrie.

"And you think it was the face of this man here beside you?"

Max struck a light and held it over the face of the unconscious Dudley. Carrie looked at him steadily.

"Well," she said at last, "it did look like him, that's all I can say."

Max frowned uneasily. But after a few moments a new thought struck him, and he turned to her sharply. The match he had struck had burned itself out, and they were again in darkness.

"If Mrs. Higgs was only a tool in his hands, as you suggest, for some mysterious purposes which nobody can understand or guess at, how do you account for her trying to drown him?"

"They must have quarreled," said Carrie, quickly. Then, instantly perceiving that she had made an admission, she added: "That is, supposing she had anything to do with it."

"Amiable old lady!" exclaimed Max.

The mystery of the whole affair hung over both him and Carrie like a pall; and the long night-drive seemed never-ending in the death-like silence. Max tried from time to time to break it, but Carrie grew more reserved as the hours went by, until her curt answers ceased altogether.

Then, when dawn came, the dull dawn of a foggy morning, and the carriage drew up at the hotel in Chatham where they were to change horses, Max discovered that she was asleep.

Dudley opened his eyes when the carriage stopped, but shut them again without a word to Max, who asked him how he felt.

Max, when the people of the hotel had been

roused, succeeded in borrowing a rug, which he wrapped gently round Carrie, without waking her. And presently the carriage jogged on again on its journey, and the morning sun began to pierce the mist as the bare Kentish hop-fields and orchards were reached.

Max leaned forward and looked at Carrie's sweet face with infinite tenderness. Now in her sleep she looked like a child, with her lips slightly parted and her eyelashes sweeping her thin, white cheeks. The alert look of the Londoner, which gave an expression of premature shrewdness to her waking face, had disappeared under the relaxing influence of slumber. She looked pitifully helpless, sad and weak, as her tired, worn-out little body leaned back in the corner of the carriage.

Max looked at her with yearning in his eyes. This young ne'er-do-weel, as his father called him, had enjoyed the privilege of his type in being a great favorite with women. As usual in such cases, he had repaid their kindness with ingratitude, and had had numerous flirtations without ever experiencing a feeling either deep or lasting

Now, for the first time, in this beautiful waif of the big city he had found a mixture of warmth and coldness, of straightforward simplicity and boldness, which opened his eyes as to there being in her

sex an attraction he had previously denied. He felt as he looked at her that he wanted her; that he could not go away and forget her in the presence of the next pretty face he happened to see.

This shabbily dressed girl, with the shiny seams in her black frock and the rusty hat, inspired him with respect, with something like reverence.

In his way he had been in love many, many times. Now for the first time he worshiped a woman.

When the carriage stopped at the park gate of The Beeches, Max sprang out, and without waiting to answer the hurried questions of Carrie, who had awakened with a start, he ran across the grass and up the slope to the house.

It was nine o'clock, and, when the door was opened by Bartram, Max came face to face with Doreen, who was entering the hall on her way to the breakfast-room.

"Why, Max, is it you? What a strange time to arrive! And where have you been? You look as if you 'd been up all night!" cried she, and she ran forward to kiss him, and swinging him round to the light, examined him, with an expression of amazement and horror.

"I have been up all night," said he, briefly. "I 've driven all the way from London--"

"What!"

"And—and I've brought some one with me—some one who is ill, who is in trouble. Some one—"

A cry broke from her lips. She had grown quite white, and her hands had dropped to her sides.

She understood.

"Dudley!" she whispered. "Where is he? Why haven't you brought him in?"

"He is at the gate. Where is my father? I must speak to him first, or to mother."

Mrs. Wedmore herself, having been informed by Bartram of the arrival of her son, now came out of the breakfast-room to meet him. In a few words he informed her of the circumstances, adding, as he was bound to do, that there was a possibility that the police might come to make inquiries, if not to arrest Dudley. But Doreen, who insisted on hearing everything, overruled the faint objection which Mrs. Wedmore made, and determined to have him brought in before her father could learn anything about it.

Max, therefore, went down to bring the carriage up to the door, and Dudley, having been roused into a half-conscious condition, was assisted into the house and up to one of the spare bedrooms—Max on one side and Bartram on the other.

By this time Mr. Wedmore had, of course, become aware of what was going on; but it was now too late to interfere, even if he had wished to do so. When Dudley had been taken upstairs, Doreen met her brother as he came down.

"Who is the girl with the sweet face inside the carriage?"

Max stammered a little, and then said, by a happy inspiration:

"Oh, that 's the nurse. You see—he was so ill—"

Doreen looked at him keenly, but did not wait for any more explanations.

"Why doesn't she come in, then? Of course she must come in."

And she ran out to the door of the carriage, with Max not far behind.

"Aren't you coming in? They 've taken your patient upstairs," she said gently, as poor Carrie, who looked more dead than alive, sat up in the carriage and tried to put her hat and her cape straight.

"Oh, I shan't be wanted now, shall I?" asked Carrie, with a timid voice and manner which contrasted strongly with her calm, easy assurance while she was at work.

Max threw a glance of gratitude at his sister,

as he quickly opened the door of the carriage and more than half dragged Carrie out.

As the girl stepped, blinking, into the broad sunlight, Doreen stared at her intently, and then glanced inquiringly at her brother, who, however, did not see her questioning look. He led Carrie into the house and straight up the stairs toward the room where they had put Dudley.

"Don't make me stay," pleaded she, in a low voice. "They will know I 'm not a regular nurse, and—and I shall be uncomfortable, miserable. You can do without me now."

She was trying to shrink away. Max stopped in the middle of the stairs, and answered her gravely, earnestly :

"I only ask you to stay until we can get a regular nurse down. He is too ill to do without a trained attendant ; you know that. Will you promise to wait while we send for one ?"

Carrie could scarcely refuse.

"Yes, I will stay till then, if I am really wanted," assented she.

"Ask my sister. Here she comes," said Max.

Doreen was on the stairs behind them.

"Is it really necessary—do you want me to stay while a nurse is sent for ?" asked Carrie, diffidently.

Doreen looked up straight in her face.

"What more natural than that you should stay with him?" returned she, promptly; "since you are his sister."

Max and Carrie both started. The likeness between Dudley and Carrie, which Max had taken time to discover, had struck Doreen at once. Carrie would have denied the allegation, but Max caught her arm and stopped her.

"Quite true," said he quietly. "This is the way, Miss Horne, to your brother's room."

Doreen was quick enough to see that there was some little mystery about the relationship which she had divined, and she went rapidly past her brother without asking any questions.

It was about two hours after Dudley's arrival that Carrie, now installed in the sick-room, came to the door and asked for Max. Her face was rigid with a great terror. She seemed at first unable to utter the words which were on her tongue. At last she said, in a voice which sounded hard and unlike her own:

"Don't send for a nurse. I must stay with him. He is delirious, and I have just learned—from him—from his ravings, a secret—a terrible secret—one that must not be known!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BLUE-EYED NURSE.

It was at the door of Dudley's sick-room that Carrie informed Max that she had learned a secret from the lips of the sick man, and Max, by a natural impulse of curiosity, nay, more, a deep interest, pushed the door gently open.

Dudley's voice could be heard muttering below his breath words which Max could not catch.

But Carrie pulled the young man sharply back by the arm into the corridor, and shut the door behind her. Her face was full of determination.

"No," said she, "not even you."

Max drew himself up, offended.

"I should think you might trust me," he said, stiffly. "The doctor will have to hear when he comes. And the secret, whatever it is, will be safer with me than with old Haselden."

Carrie smiled a little, and shook her head.

"The doctor," said she, "wouldn't be able to make head or tail of what he says. Now, you would."

"And if I did, what of that? Don't I know everything, or almost everything, already? Didn't I bring him down here, to my father's house, after I knew that there was a warrant out against him? What better proof do you want that the secret would be safe with me?"

But Carrie would not give way. Without entering into an argument, she stood before him with a set look of obstinacy in her mouth and eyes, slowly shaking her head once or twice as he went on with his persuasions.

"Do you think I should make a wrong use of the secret?" asked Max, impatiently.

"Oh, no."

"Do you think it would turn me against him?"

But at this question she hesitated.

"I don't know," said she, at last.

"It is something that has given you pain?" Max went on, noting the traces of tears on her face and the misery in her eyes.

"Yes, oh, yes."

The answer was given in a very low voice, with such a heart-felt sob that Max was touched to the quick. He came quite close to her, and, bending down, so that his mustache almost brushed the soft fair hair on her forehead, he whispered:

"I 'm so sorry. Poor Carrie! I won't worry you,

then ; I won't ask any more questions, if only—if only you 'll let me tell you how awfully sorry I am."

He ventured to put his hand upon her shoulder, as he bent down to look into her face.

And, as luck would have it, Mr. Wedmore at that very moment bounced out of one of the rooms which opened on the corridor, and caught sight of this pretty little picture before it broke up.

Of course, Max withdrew his hand and lifted up his head so swiftly that he flattered himself he had been too quick for his father, who walked along the corridor toward the drawing-room as if he had seen nothing.

But Max was mistaken. Mr. Wedmore, already greatly irritated by his son's repeated failures to settle down, found in this little incident a pretext for a fresh outburst of wrath.

Unluckily for poor Carrie, Mrs. Wedmore was in a state of irritation, in which she was even readier than usual to agree with her husband. The arrival of Dudley, with a terrible charge hanging over his head, in such circumstances as to stir up Doreen's feelings for him to the utmost, was bad enough. But for him to descend upon them in the company of a young woman of whom she had never heard, and in whose alleged relationship to Dudley she entirely disbelieved, had reduced the poor lady to

a state which Queenie succinctly described as "one of mamma's worst."

As soon as Mr. Wedmore entered the drawing-room, where his wife and daughters were discussing some invitations to dinner which were to have been sent out, but about which there was now a doubt, he abruptly ordered the two girls to leave the room. They obeyed very quietly, but Doreen threw at her mother one imploring glance, and gently pulling her father's hair, told him that he was not to be a hard, heartless man.

When the door was shut, however, Mr. Wedmore addressed his wife in no very gentle tones.

"Ellen," said he, curtly, "you must get rid of that baggage they call the nurse. She's no more a nurse than you are!"

"And she's no more his sister than I am, either!" chimed in Mrs. Wedmore, who had risen from her chair in great excitement.

Mr. Wedmore stared at his wife.

"Sister!" cried he, in a voice of thunder. "Whose sister? Dudley Horne never had a sister!"

"I know that, but that 's the story they have made up for us; and the girls—our girls—are ready to believe it, and I don't want them to know it isn't true."

"Well, whatever she is, and whoever she is, I want her to be outside the house before lunch time," said Mr. Wedmore. "I've just caught Max with his arm around her, and I haven't the slightest doubt that it was he who made up the story. Any tale's good enough for the old people! Look at her face—look at her dress! She is some hussy who ought never to have been allowed inside the house!"

"It was Doreen who brought her in. And, to do her justice, George, I believe the girl didn't want to come," said Mrs. Wedmore. "And it's about Doreen I wanted to talk to you, George. This coming of Dudley has upset all the good we did by never mentioning him to her. To-day she's as much excited, as anxious and as miserable as if they were still engaged. And—and—oh! if the police come here to the house and take him awa-a-ay,"—and here the poor lady became almost too hysterical to articulate—"it will break the child's heart, George; it will indeed. And, oh! do you think it possible he really did—really did—"

"Did what?"

"Oh, you know! It's to dreadful to say. Why do you make me say it? They say something about his having gone out of his mind, and—and—killed somebody. It isn't true, George, is it?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure. Who told you?"

"Max first, and then I learned the rest from the guesses of the girls. Oh, it is dreadful—shocking! And to think of his having been planted down upon us like this, just when I was beginning to hope that Doreen was getting kinder to Mr. Lindsay."

"It 's all the doing of that idiot Max!" said Mr. Wedmore, angrily. "I 'll send him out to the Cape, and make an end of it. He shall go next month."

"Oh, I didn't want that," pleaded Mrs. Wedmore, with a sudden change to tenderness and self-reproach. "Don't do anything in a hurry, George, anything you will be sorry for afterward."

"Sorry for! The only thing I 'm sorry for is that I didn't send him before, and saved all this."

"And as for the girl, no doubt it 's her fault, and Dudley's, a great deal more than Max's," went on the mother of Max, with the usual feminine excuse for the darling scapegrace. "When she 's gone he will forget all about her, as he always does."

This speech was an unlucky one.

"Yes, that's just what I complain of, that he always forgets," said he, turning sharply upon his wife. "If he would stick to anything or to anybody for so much as a week, or a day, or an hour, I

shouldn't mind so much. But he isn't man enough for that. As soon as this girl 's out of the house, he 'll be looking about for another one."

"I'm sure it wasn't his fault that she came here at all," persisted Mrs. Wedmore, who never opposed her husband except in the interest of her son. "And I 'm sure you can't blame him for doing what he could for his friend, even if he does put us to a little inconvenience. After all, Dudley 's been like a son to you for a great many years—"

"That's just what I complain of—that he 's so like a son," interrupted her husband. "That is to say, he has brought upon us no end of worry and bother, and a bill for five guineas for this pleasant little drive down from London."

"Well, how could we refuse to take him in?"

"How did he get into the mess?"

"What mess?"

"That's what I want to know, too—what mess? I am told he fell into the water, striking his head against the side of a bridge, or of a church, or it doesn't matter what, as he fell. They haven't thought it worth while to make up a good story. But whether he was drunk, or whether he was escaping from the police, or what he was doing, nobody seems to know. If I 'd been consulted, if I hadn't been treated as a cipher in the matter, he

should have driven straight back to London again with the girl, and with Max himself."

Mrs. Wedmore thought it better to say nothing to this, but to let her husband simmer down. These ferocious utterances came from the lips only, as she very well knew, and might safely be disregarded.

Fortunately his attention was diverted at this point by the arrival of the doctor, who had been out on his rounds when they first sent for him.

Rather relieved to have a fresh person to pour out his complaints to, Mr. Wedmore hastened to give his old friend a somewhat confused account of the patient's arrival and condition, in which "cheap, ready-made clothes," "a bill for five guineas," "a baggage of a girl" and "the police" were the prominent items.

But as for any details concerning the patient's state of health and the reasons for his needing medical care, Doctor Haselden could learn nothing at all until he had prevailed upon Mr. Wedmore to let him see Dudley instead of listening to abuse of him.

Doctor Haselden was a long time in the sick-room, and when he came out he looked grave. Mr. Wedmore, who met him outside the door, was annoyed.

"It's nothing, I suppose, that a few days' quiet won't set right?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered the doctor. "It's more serious than I thought by what you said —a great deal more serious. I don't know, I'm sure, whether we shall get him round at all."

A little cry startled both men and made them look round. In a recess of the corridor above they could distinguish the figure of a woman, and Mr. Wedmore's heart smote him, for it was Doreen.

"Go away, child! Go away!" said he, half petulantly, but yet with some remorse in his tone. "The girl's crazy about him," he added, with irritation, when his daughter had silently obeyed.

"Poor child! Poor child!" said Doctor Haselden, sympathetically. "She's the real old-fashioned sort, with a warm heart under all her little airs. I hope he'll get round, if only for her sake. But—"

"She couldn't marry him in any case," said Mr. Wedmore, shortly. "I thought I told you that affair was broken off—definitely broken off—weeks ago. And now—"

He stopped and intimated by a gesture of the hand that the break was more definite than ever.

The doctor was curious, but he tried not to show it.

"I should wire up to town for another nurse, I think," said he. "This little girl can't do it all."

Mr. Wedmore pricked up his ears.

"Then I must wire for two—for two nurses," said he, decidedly. "We're going to send this girl off. She's not a nurse at all."

"Ah, but she does very well," objected the doctor, promptly, "and you will be doing very unwisely if you send her away. It seems she understands all the circumstances of the case, and that counts for something in treating a patient who has evidently something on his mind. She seems to be able to soothe him, and in a case of concussion—"

"But she's trying to get hold of my fool of a son Max!" protested Mr. Wedmore.

"But it isn't a question of your son Max, but of young Horne," said Doctor Haselden, with decision. "As for Max, he can take care of himself; and, at any rate, he 's got all his family about to take care of him. You keep the girl. She 's got a head on her shoulders. Most uncommon thing, that—in a girl with such eyes!'

And the doctor, with a humorous nod to his angry friend, went downstairs.

After this warning of the real danger in which Dudley lay, it was, of course, impossible for Mr. Wedmore to send poor Carrie away, at any rate until the arrival of some one who could take her place. And as there was clearly some sense in the doctor's

suggestion that her knowledge of the case was valuable, Mr. Wedmore ended by sending up for one trained nurse to relieve her, instead of for two, as he had proposed.

And, after all, there seemed to be less danger in the direction of Max than he had supposed; for Carrie never once left the sick-room until the professional nurse arrived at ten o'clock that night. And as Mrs. Wedmore was then in waiting to mount guard over Carrie, and to carry her off to her supper and then to her bedroom, the first day's danger to the susceptible son and heir seemed to have been got through rather well.

On the following morning, however, the well-watched Carrie escaped from the supervision of her jailers, and boldly made a direct attack upon Max under the family's nose.

Carrie was looking out of one of the back windows of the house to get a breath of fresh air, before taking her turn of duty in the sick-room, when she saw Max talking to one of the grooms outside the stables. He saw her, and his face flushed. Mrs. Wedmore, who was standing on guard a few paces from Carrie, noted the fact with maternal anxiety. She rather liked the girl, whose modest manners were as attractive as her pretty face; but with the fear of "entanglements" before her eyes,

she tried to check her own inclination. Carrie turned to her abruptly.

"The nurse won't mind waiting a few minutes for me," said she, quickly. "I must speak a few words to Mr. Max."

And before Mrs. Wedmore could get breath after this audacious statement, Carrie was down the stairs and half away across the yard, where Max hastened to meet her.

"I have something to say to you," she began at once with a grave face. "Do you know that—*they've come?*"

"Who? Who have come?"

"The police."

Max started.

"Nonsense! What makes you think so? I've seen no one."

"I have, though. I've been expecting them, for one thing, and it's made me sharp, I suppose. But I've seen in the park, among the trees, this morning before anybody was up almost, a man walking about, taking his bearings and looking about him."

"One of the gardeners," said Max. "There are several."

"Oh, no, it wasn't a gardener. Can't you trust my London eyes? And listen: Presently another one came up, and they talked together. Then one

went one way and the other another, not like gardeners or workingmen, but like men on the lookout."

"What should they be on the lookout for?" asked Max. "If they want Dudley, why don't they come up to the house? I don't doubt that by this time they know where he is."

Carrie said nothing; but there was in her eyes, as she glanced searchingly round her, a peculiar look of wistful dread which puzzled Max and made him wonder what fear it was that was in her mind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAX MAKES A STAND AND A DISCOVERY.

There was a pause, and then Carrie, without answering him, turned to go back into the house. But Max followed and caught her by the arm.

"Carrie," said he, "they're making a slave of you, without a word of thanks. You look worn out."

"No, I'm not," said she, briskly. "I've only taken my turns; I should look all right if it hadn't been for that long, tiring journey yesterday. I haven't quite got over that yet."

She was trying to free her hand, which Max was holding in his.

"You'll never be strong enough for a hospital nurse, Carrie!"

"Oh, yes, but I shall!" retorted she. And as she spoke, the pink color, the absence of which made her usually look so delicate, came into her cheeks. "And you must remember that I shall be better fed, better clothed then. I am not really weak at all."

"I repeat—you will never be strong enough for a nurse. Better take my advice and marry me, Carrie!"

But at that, a sudden impulse of hot anger gave the girl the necessary strength to snatch her hand away from him. She faced him fiercely.

"What! To be looked at always as your father, your mother, look at me now? As if I were a thief who must be watched, lest she should steal something? They needn't be afraid either, if only they knew! And before I go I 'll tell them. Yes, I 'll tell them what a mistake they make in thinking I want to take their son, their precious son, away from them! That for their son!"

And Carrie, very ungratefully, to be sure, held her right hand close to the face of Max and snapped her fingers scornfully. She had seen Mrs. Wedmore's eyes over the half blind of one of the windows, and the minx thought this little scene would be a wholesome lesson.

But Max, following the direction of Carrie's eyes, had also seen the watching face, and a manful spirit of defiance on the one hand, of passion on the other, moved him to show both Carrie and his mother how things were going with him.

Seizing the girl round the waist when her little spurt of defiance was scarcely over, he held her

head with his disengaged hand and pressed upon her eyes, her cheeks and her lips a dozen hot kisses.

"There!" said he, when at last he let her go, and she, staggering, blushing, ran toward the shelter of the house. "That's what you get for being ungrateful, you little cat. And it's nothing to what you'll get from my mother, who's sure to say it's all your fault. And so—" roared he up the stairs after her, as she reached the top, "so it is, of course!"

But Carrie found a refuge inside the sick-room, where Dudley, who had passed a better night than they had even hoped, was now lying with closed eyes, quiet and apparently calm.

It was upon Max himself, for a wonder, that the vials of the family wrath were poured. Mrs. Wedmore, happening to meet her husband while the last grievance against the girl was fresh, and before she had had the time to meditate on the result of a premature disclosure, made known to him the outrage of which she had been a witness, taking care to dwell upon the audacity of the girl in pursuing and provoking Max.

Mr. Wedmore listened in silence, and then said, curtly:

"Where is he now? Send him to me."

Max, bent upon making himself as conspicuous

and, therefore, as offensive as possible, was whistling in the hall at the moment. And there was a defiant note in his very whistling which worked his father up to boiling point. Mr. Wedmore sprang off his chair and dashed open the door.

"Max, you fool, come here!" was his unpromising summons.

Max came at once, rather red in the face and bright of eyes. Mrs. Wedmore, standing, frightened and anxious, in the background, thought she had never seen her darling boy look so handsome, so manly. He came in very quietly, without swaggering, without defiance, as if he had not noticed the offensive epithet.

His father, who was by this time on the post of vantage, the hearth-rug, with his hands behind him and his back to the fire, pointed imperiously to a chair.

"Sit down, sir."

Max sat down very deliberately on a chair other than the one his father had chosen for him, and looked down on the floor.

"So you are at your old tricks, your old habits!" began Mr. Wedmore.

Max looked up. Then he sat up.

"What old tricks and habits do you mean, sir?"

"Running after every girl you see, and in defiance of all decency, under your mother's very nose."

Mrs. Wedmore would have interposed here, but her husband waved his hand imperially, and she remained silent. Max leaned back in his chair and met his father's eyes steadily.

"You have made a mistake, sir, and my mother has made a mistake, too. It is quite true she may have seen me kissing Miss—Miss—Carrie, in fact. But I hope to have the right to kiss her. I want to marry her."

"To marry this—this—"

"This beautiful young girl, whom nobody has a word to say against," interrupted Max, in a louder voice. "Come, sir, you can't say I'm at my old tricks *now*. I've never wanted to marry any girl before."

For the moment Mr. Wedmore was stupefied. This was worse, far worse than he had expected. Mrs. Wedmore, also, was rather shocked. But the sensation was tempered, in her case, with admiration of her boy's spirit in daring to make this avowal.

"Mind, I only say I *want* to marry her. Because, so far, she has refused to have anything to say to me."

"Not refused to marry you!" broke in Mrs. Wed-

more, unable to remain quiet under such provocation as this.

"Yes, refused to marry me, mother. I have asked her—begged her."

"Oh, it 's only artfulness, to make you more persistent," cried Mrs. Wedmore, indignantly.

"Or perhaps," suggested Mr. Wedmore, in his driest tones, "the girl is shrewd enough to know that I should cut off a son who was guilty of such a piece of idiocy and leave him to his own resources."

Max said nothing for a moment; then he remarked, quietly:

"You have been threatening to do that already, sir, before there was any question of my marrying."

Mrs. Wedmore was frightened by the tone Max was using. He was so much quieter than usual, so much more decided in his tone, that she began to think there was less chance than usual of his coming to an agreement with his father.

"You know, Max," she said, coming over to his chair and putting an affectionate hand on his head, "that your father has only spoken to you as he has done because he wanted to rouse up your spirit and make you ashamed of being lazy."

Max rose from his chair and turned to her with flashing eyes.

"And now, when there is a chance of my rousing myself at last, when I am ready and anxious to prove it, and to set to work, and to settle down, he is angrier with me than ever. Mother, you know I 'm right, and you know it isn't fair."

Mrs. Wedmore looked with something like terror into her son's handsome, excited face.

"But, my dear boy, don't you see that this would be ruin, to tie yourself to a girl like that? Why, she told me herself that she didn't belong to anywhere or anybody."

"And is that any reason why she should never belong to anywhere or to anybody? If there was anything wrong about the girl herself, I would listen to you—"

"Listen to us! You 'll have to listen!" interrupted his father.

Max glanced at him, and went on:

"But there is not."

"And how do you know that? How long have you known her?"

Max was taken aback. It had not occurred to him to think how short his acquaintance with Carrie had been.

"Long enough to find out all about her," he answered, soberly; "and to make up my mind that I 'll have her for my wife."

"Then that settles it," broke in Mr. Wedmore, whose ill-humor had not been decreased by the fact that Max evidently considered it more important to conciliate his mother than to try to convince him. "You will go to the Cape next month; and if you choose to take this baggage with you, you can do so. It won't much matter to us what sort of a wife you introduce to your neighbors out there."

But Max strode across the room and stood face to face with his father, eye to eye.

"No, sir," he said, in a dogged tone of voice, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets and looking at him steadily. "I shall not go to the Cape. You have a right to turn me out of your house if you please. In fact, it 's quite time I went, I know. It 's time I did settle down. It 's time I did try to do something for myself. And I 'm going to. I 'm going to try to earn my own living and to make enough to keep a wife—the wife I want. And I shall do it somehow. But I 'm not going to be packed off to Africa, as if my marrying this girl were a thing to be ashamed of. I 'm going to stay in England. I sha'n't come near you. You needn't be afraid of that. I shall be too proud of my wife to bring her among people who would look down upon her. And perhaps you 'd better not inquire where I live or what I 'm doing, for we sha'n't be

able to live in a fashionable neighborhood, nor to be too particular about what we turn our hands to."

While Max made this speech very slowly, very deliberately, his father listened to him with ever-increasing anger and disgust, and his mother, not daring to come too close while he was right under the paternal eye, hung over the table in the background, with yearning, tremulous love in her eyes, and with her lips parted, ready to utter the tender words of a pleading peacemaker.

But the tone Mr. Wedmore chose to take was that of utter contempt, complete irresponsibility. When his son had finished speaking he waited as if to hear whether there was any more to come, and then abruptly turned his back upon him and began to poke the fire.

"Very well," said he, with an affectation of extreme calmness. "Since you have made up your mind, the sooner you begin to carry out your plans the better. I 'm very glad to see that you have a mind to make up."

"Thank you, sir," said Max.

And he was turning to leave the room, when his mother sprang forward and stopped him.

"No, no! Don't go like that! My boy! George! Don't say good-bye yet. Take a little time. Let him try a little trouble of his own for a change. He

has made up his mind, he says. I 'm sure he 's old enough. Leave him alone."

Max put his arm round his mother, gave her a warm kiss, disengaged himself, and left the room.

The poor woman was almost hysterical.

" He means it, George! He means it this time!" she moaned.

And her husband, though he laughed at her, and though he said to himself that he did not care, was inclined to agree with her.

Max went straight up to his own room, and began to do his packing with much outward cheerfulness. Indeed he felt no depression over the dashing step he was taking, although he felt sore over the parting with home and his mother and sisters.

He was debating within himself whether he should try to see Carrie before he went, or whether he should only leave a note to be given to her after he was gone, when he heard the voice of his sister Doreen calling him. He threw open the door and shouted back.

She was in the hall.

" Max," cried she, in a hissing whisper, " I want to speak to you. Make haste!"

He ran downstairs and found her standing with two of the maids, both of whom looked rather frightened.

"Max," said Doreen, "there's an old woman hanging about the place—" Max started. He guessed what was coming. "The same old woman that came at Christmas time. She jumped up in the well-house at Anne, and sent her into hysterics. And now they've lost sight of her, just as they did last time, and we want you to help to ferret her out and send her away."

"All right," said Max. "We'll pack her off."

He was at the bottom of the staircase by this time, and was starting on his way to the yard, when a little scream from one of the two maids, as she glanced up the stairs, made him look around. Carrie had come down so lightly and so swiftly that she was upon the group before they had heard a sound. She beckoned to Max, who came back at once.

Carrie was shaking like a leaf; her eyes were wide with alarm, with terror. Max went up a few stairs, to be out of hearing of the others, as she seemed to wish. Then she whispered:

"You know who it is. I saw her. Leave her alone. I implore you to leave her alone! She'll do no harm. Let her rest. Let the poor creature rest. If—if the police—"

At that moment there was a shout from the yard outside. Carrie sprang like a hare up the stairs

to the window, and looked out with straining eyes.

The afternoon was one of those dull, misty winter days, with a leaden sky and an east wind.

"I 'll see that she isn't hurt!" called out Max, as he bounded down the stairs and ran into the yard behind the house.

Here he found a motley group—the stablemen, the laundry-maids and the gardeners—all hunting in the many corners and crannies of the outbuildings for the old woman who had alarmed Anne.

Max spoke sharply to the men.

"Here, what are you about?" said he. "Hunting a poor old woman as if she were a wild animal? Go back to your work. She 'll never dare to show her face while you are all about!"

"She 's left the well-house, sir, and, we think, she 's got into the big barn," explained one of the lads, with the feeling that Mr. Max himself would want to join in the chase when he knew that the game was to hand.

"Well, leave her there," answered Max, promptly. "She 'll come out when you 've all gone, and I 'll send her about her business."

Max saw, as he spoke, that there was a man standing at a little distance, just outside the stable-gate, whom he did not recognize. Before he could

ask who he was, however, the man had disappeared from view. He remembered what Carrie had said about the presence of a policeman, and he thought the time was come to take the bull by the horns.

So he walked rapidly in the direction of the gate, and addressed the man whom he found there.

"Are you a policeman?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes, sir," answered the man, touching his hat.

"What is your business here?"

"I'm on the lookout for some one I have a warrant for. Charge of murder, sir."

"Man or woman?"

"Man, sir."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"Horne, sir."

Max thought a moment.

"Why are you pottering about here, instead of going straight up to the house?"

"Well, sir, I'm obeying orders."

"Come with me," said Max suddenly. "There's an old hag hiding in the barn now, who knows more about this business than Mr. Horne."

Behind the young gentleman's back the detective smiled, but he professed to be ready to follow him.

"There's only one way out of this barn," explained Max, as he approached the door, beside which a groom was standing. "By this door,

which is never locked. There is a window, but it 's too high up for anybody to get out by."

Telling the groom to guard the door, Max went into the barn, followed by the detective. There was still light enough for them to find their way about among the lumber.

"Where 's the window, sir?" asked the detective.

Max pointed to a speck of light high in the south wall of the barn."

"She couldn't get out there," said he, "even if she could climb up to it. Unless she could swarm a rope."

And he touched one of the ropes which dangled from a huge beam.

The detective, however, walked rapidly past him, and stopped short, pointing to something which was lying on the floor under the window.

It was the body of a man, lying in a heap.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

Max helped the detective raise the man from the ground. He was quite dead, and from the position in which they had found him, both men concluded that he had been in the act of climbing up to the high window, when the rope by which he was holding broke under his weight. It was evident that he had fallen upon an old millstone which was among the lumber on the floor beneath, and that the shock of the fall had broken his neck.

They had found out all this before Max could form any opinion as to the identity of the dead man. He was short of stature, and apparently between fifty and sixty years of age, slightly built, but muscular. The body was dressed in the clothes of a respectable mechanic.

There was very little light in the barn by this time, and Max directed the groom, who had been standing outside, and who had entered, attracted by Max's shout of discovery, to bring a lantern.

"I suppose we 'd better send for a doctor," said Max, "though the man 's as dead as a doornail. In the meantime, just give a look around and see whether the woman is anywhere about."

The detective appeared to follow the suggestion, for he at once proceeded to a further inspection of the building by the aid of one of the two lanterns which the groom had by this time brought. And presently he came back to Max with a bundle in his hand.

Max, by the light of the lantern which the groom was holding for him, was looking at the face of the dead man, whom he guessed to be one of Mrs. Higgs's accomplices, perhaps the mysterious person whose influence over the old woman, according to Carrie, was so bad.

While he was staring intently at the dead face, he heard a stifled cry, and looking up, saw that Carrie had stolen into the barn behind the groom, and had her eyes fixed upon the body.

Max sprang up.

"Do you know him? Is it the man who used to get into the place by night?" asked he, eagerly.

Carrie, without answering, looked from the dead man to the detective, and from him to the bundle he was carrying.

"Ah!" exclaimed she.

Max looked in his turn. The detective was displaying, one by one, a woman's skirt, bodice, bonnet, shawl and a cap with a "front" of woman's hair sewn inside it.

"I think you can guess, sir, what's become of the woman now?" said the officer, grimly.

Max started violently, shocked by a surprise which, both for the detective and for Carrie, had been discounted some time ago.

"Mrs. Higgs" was a man.

Even with this knowledge to help him, Max, as he stared again at the dead face, found it difficult to recognize in the still features those which in life had inspired him with feelings of repulsion.

Just a quiet, inoffensive, respectable-looking man, not coarse or low in type; this would have been his comment upon the dead man, if he had known nothing about him. Max shuddered as he withdrew his gaze; and, as he did so, he met the eyes of Carrie.

He beckoned to her to come away with him, and she followed him as far as the door, toward which some members of the household, to whom the news had penetrated, were now hastening.

"Carrie!" cried he, as he looked searchingly in her face, "you knew this? How long have you known it?"

She could scarcely answer. She was shaking from head to foot, and was evidently suffering from a great shock.

"Yes, I knew it, but only since I came here. It was part of what Mr. Dudley Horne let out in his raving."

"Only part of it?" cried Max.

But Carrie would confess nothing more. And, as Mr. Wedmore came across the yard at this moment, followed by Dr. Haselden, Carrie ran back into the house as Max met his father.

"What 's all this about a dead man found in the barn?" asked Mr. Wedmore, with all the arrogance of the country gentleman, who thinks that no one has a right to die on his premises without his permission.

Max held his father back for a moment until the doctor had passed on. In the excitement of this occurrence, Mr. Wedmore was glad to have an opportunity of appearing to forget that there was any quarrel between them. On second thoughts, he inclined to think that he had perhaps, on this occasion, been a little too hard on his son, and he was anxious for some loop-hole by which he could creep out of the consequences of his own sternness. This, however, could hardly have been guessed by his manner, which was at least as arrogant as ever.

"It's somebody who was mixed up in the death of Edward Jacobs, sir, I think," said Max, in a low voice. "A man who has been living down at the East End of London disguised as a woman, and who was, I believe, at the bottom of all the mischief."

"Man disguised as a woman?" cried Mr. Wedmore, incredulously. "What an improbable story! And what should he do down here in my barn?"

"I think he must have come down to see Dudley, sir. We believe that it was he who tried to drown Dudley, after he had succeeded in drowning Edward Jacobs."

Mr. Wedmore frowned in perplexity.

"Trying to drown Dudley! What on earth should he do that for? What had Dudley to do with him?"

"Well, sir, we don't quite know. But Dudley was acquainted with this man, undoubtedly, though we don't know whether he knew him to be a man, or only as Mrs. Higgs, which was the name the man went by."

"Let me see the man," said Mr. Wedmore.

And, pushing past his son, he entered the barn.

The doctor made way for him.

"He is quite dead. He must have been killed

instantly," said Doctor Haselden, as his friend came up.

Mr. Wedmore took the lantern from the man who held it, and looked at the dead face. As he did so, his first expression of curiosity gave place to one of perplexity, followed by a stare of intense amazement and horror.

"What is it? Do you know him?" asked Doctor Haselden, while Max, who had followed his father in, watched with intense interest and surprise.

Mr. Wedmore did not seem to hear. He continued to look at the dead face for some moments with an appearance of utter absorption, and then, suddenly staggering back, he made for the open air without a word of explanation.

Max stared at the doctor, and then followed his father out. But Mr. Wedmore was already half way to the house, where he shut himself into the study, and locking the door, refused to be disturbed.

Max was more bewildered than ever by this new turn of affairs. With a dogged determination not to be kept any longer out of a secret of which everybody but himself seemed to know something, he went straight up to the sick-room in search of Carrie. His knock, however, was answered by the professional nurse, who opened the door and asked him what he wanted.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Max. "At least—I wanted to know how Mr. Horne is now."

"He won't be so well to-night, I expect," answered the nurse, tartly. "There 's been a great noise and disturbance outside, and he 's heard something of it, and it 's made him restless and curious. He is asking questions about it all the time, and he won't be satisfied. He keeps asking for the other nurse, who is out taking her walk, as I tell him."

At this point Dudley's voice was heard from the bed. "Who 's that at the door? Who is it?"

Max, after a moment's hesitation, during which the nurse assumed an air of washing her hands of the whole matter, answered:

"Me, old chap—Max. How are you?"

Dudley sprang up in bed. The nurse folded her arms and frowned.

"Come in, oh, come in, just one moment! I 'll be quiet, nurse, quite quiet. But I must see him—I must see somebody."

Max threw an imploring glance at the nurse, who refused to look at him. Then he went in.

"Only a minute—I won't stay a minute."

The nurse shrugged her shoulders.

"It 's against the doctor's orders. I wash my hands of the consequences," said she.

And, with her head held very high, she left the room.

Max stood irresolute. By the look of excitement on Dudley's face, he judged that anything must be better for him than the eager suspense from which he was evidently suffering. This news of the death of the odious inhabitant of the house by the wharf must surely bring relief to him. As soon as they were alone together, Dudley burst out eagerly:

"That noise! It's no use deceiving me; I know what it was. They were after him. Tell me—has he got away? Has my father got away?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BACK TO LOVE AND LIFE.

Max fell into a chair. He stared at Dudley for a few moments before he could speak. Dudley's father! The man supposed to have died years and years ago in an asylum abroad, was the person who had passed as "Mrs. Higgs!" Even before he had had time to learn any of the details of the strange story, the outlines of it were at once apparent to the mind of Max.

Here was, then, the explanation of the mysterious bond between Dudley and Mrs. Higgs; here was the meaning of his visits to Limehouse.

Dudley repeated his question before Max had recovered from the shock of his surprise.

"Yes," said he at last, "he has got away."

But Dudley detected some reserve in his manner, or perhaps his own suspicions were aroused. He looked searchingly at Max, and asked abruptly:

"Is he dead?"

Max looked at him askance.

"Yes," he said at last.

Dudley lay back in his pillows.

"Thank God!"

And Max knew by the look of intense relief on his friend's face that he had done right in telling him the truth.

But, indeed, Max could not guess how intense the relief was from the burden of the secret which Dudley had had to bear for so long; and undoubtedly the discovery that it was a secret no longer, that the necessity for concealment was now over, helped his recovery materially.

Max told him, as briefly as possible, the details of the occurrence; but he neither asked nor invited any more questions.

It was not until some time afterward, when Dudley had left the sick-room, that the whole of the story became known to the family. But, in the meantime, the inquest on the body brought many facts to light.

Mrs. Edward Jacobs, the widow of the man who had been found drowned in the Thames off Limehouse some weeks before, had been, so it was discovered, the person to give information to the police against Dudley, as the suspected murderer of her husband. She had traced to him the weekly postal orders, which she looked upon as blood-money, and

she had then hung about his chambers, and on one occasion followed him to Limehouse, without, however, penetrating farther than the entrance of the wharf.

Upon the information given by her a warrant was issued against Dudley; but in searching his chambers a number of letters were found, all addressed to Dudley, which threw a new and lurid light upon the affair. The letters were written by the father to the son, and contained the whole story of his return to England a few months before; of his anxiety to see his son; his morbid fear of being recognized and shut up as a lunatic, and his equally morbid hankering after information concerning Edward Jacobs, the man who had ruined him.

All these letters, which were directed in a feigned handwriting, seemed sane and sensible enough, although they showed signs of eccentricity of character.

The next batch were written after the disappearance of Edward Jacobs, and in them the signs of morbid eccentricity were more apparent. The writer owned to having "put Jacobs out of the way," upbraided Dudley for interfering on behalf of such a wretch, and accused him of ingratitude in refusing to leave England with his father, who had done mankind in general and him in particular a service

in killing a monster. The writer went on to accuse Dudley of siding with his father's enemies, of wishing to have him shut up, and told him that he should never succeed.

Some of these letters were directed to The Beeches, and some to Dudley's chambers, showing an intimate knowledge of his whereabouts.

The latest letters were wilder, more bitter, showing how insanity which had broken out into violence before was increasing in intensity, and how the feelings of regard which he had seemed to entertain for his son had given place to strong resentment against him.

After the reading of these letters, it was plain that the crime of murder which Mrs. Jacobs had laid to Dudley's charge had been really the work of his father; and Mrs. Jacobs herself, on being made acquainted with these facts, agreed with this conclusion.

There remained only the question of Dudley's complicity in the crime to be considered, and that was a matter which could be left until the sick man's recovery.

It was on the first day of Dudley's appearance in the family circle that the subject was broached, clumsily enough, by Mr. Wedmore, who was dying to know a great deal more than anybody had been willing to tell him.

Dudley had come into the drawing-room, which had been well warmed for the occasion with a roaring fire, and it was here that they found him after luncheon, with the professional nurse beside him.

The girls greeted him rather shyly, especially Doreen, but Mrs. Wedmore was motherly and gentle. Mr. Wedmore attacked him at once.

"I can't understand, Dudley, why you kept it all so dark. Couldn't you see for yourself that it was better for your father to be under restraint, as well as safer for other people?"

Mrs. Wedmore tried to interpose and to change the conversation to another subject, but Dudley said:

"I would rather explain now, once and for all. I shall be going away to-morrow, and there are several things which I should like to make clear first." He paused, and Mrs. Wedmore, her daughters and the nurse took the opportunity to leave the room. "Now, Mr. Wedmore, tell me what you want to know."

"Well, you told us nothing about your father's being alive and back in England, for one thing."

"It was by his wish that I kept it a secret. He persisted that he was sane; he seemed to be sane. But he believed that if it were known that he was in England he would be shut up."

"But the passing himself off as an old woman, this living in a sort of underground way, didn't that look like madness?"

"I took it for eccentricity and nothing more, until—until he sent for me one day, and brought me suddenly into a room—a little dark, bare room—where there was a man lying on the ground asleep, as I thought. My father told me to bring him into the next room, and—when I stooped to touch him"—Dudley shuddered at the ghastly recollection—"my hands were covered with blood."

"Good gracious! He had murdered him?"

"Yes. And from that time he seemed a different man. I saw that he was mad. I tried to persuade him to give himself up, to let himself be put under restraint. I laid traps for him, trying to take him to an asylum. But he was too cunning for me, and all I got by it was to rouse in him a bitter feeling of hatred of myself."

"Why didn't you give information—to the police, if necessary?"

"How could I? My own father! I believed he would be hanged if he was caught. I believe so still. The last time I saw him he seemed sane, except for a feeling of irritation against me and against Carrie, who, it seems, is my half-sister. But

he attacked me suddenly, knocked me on the head, and tried to drown me. There, now you know as much as I do. Can you wonder now that I was obliged to cut myself off from my friends, with such a burden as that on my mind?"

Mr. Wedmore was silent for a time.

"Poor lad!" he said at last. "Poor lad! I think you might have found some better way out of it than holding your tongue and shutting yourself up from all your friends; but, on the other hand, it was a jolly difficult position. Jolly difficult! And so you never even told Max?"

"No, though I more than once felt inclined to. But it was such a ghastly business altogether that I thought I'd better hold my tongue, especially as —I was afraid—it might filter through him to—to somebody else—somebody who couldn't be told a beastly secret like that."

Mr. Wedmore nodded.

"And this girl—this Carrie?" said he.

Dudley's face lighted up.

"That's my one comfort in all this," said he, "that it has led to my finding out the girl and doing something for her. I never heard of her before. But my father told me she was my half-sister, and they say there is something in our faces which confirms the story. Anyhow, she's a grand girl,

and I 'm going to look after her. She 's gone away—"

"Gone away!" repeated Mr. Wedmore, disconcerted.

There had been a lull in the quarrel between him and his son for the last few days, during which Carrie had avoided Max and Max had avoided his father.

"Yes," said Dudley. "She would go, and she thought it best to go without any fuss, leaving me to say good-bye for her. She 's all right. I 'm going to look after her; and she 's going into training as a hospital nurse."

"Oh, well, I 'm sure I hope she 'll get on," said Mr. Wedmore, rather vaguely.

He had been getting used, during the last few days, to the thought of the pretty, blue-eyed girl as a daughter-in-law, and he found himself now rather hoping than fearing that Max would stick to his choice.

"Well," said he at last, "I must send the ladies to have a look at you now, I suppose. I wouldn't let them talk my head off on the first day, if I were you."

Dudley sprang to his feet. He seemed restless and excited.

"I won't talk much. I won't let them talk much,"

said he, in an unsteady voice. "But may I see—may I speak to Doreen?"

Mr. Wedmore nodded good-humoredly.

"Well, you may speak to her, if she 'll let you," said he, cheerfully. "But, really, she 's a thorny young person. She 's treated young Lindsay, the curate, very cruelly, and I 'm sure he 's a much better looking fellow than you. However, you can try your luck."

Dudley did not wait for any more encouragement. No sooner had Mr. Wedmore left the room than the convalescent followed. He found Doreen in the hall, putting a handful of letters on the table ready for the post. She started when she turned and saw him, and, leaning back with her hands upon the table, she asked him what he meant by leaving the nice, warm, ox-roasting fire they had built up expressly for him upstairs.

"I hear you 've been treating the curate very badly," said he. "I 've come to ask for an explanation."

Doreen looked down at the tip of her shoe, and, after a pause, said demurely :

"Well, I suppose if you don't know the reason, nobody does."

"Why, was it anything connected with me, then?"

"So I have been informed," answered Doreen, more primly than ever.

And then he waited for her to look up ; and when she did, he kissed her. And they didn't exchange a word upon the subject of the long misunderstanding, but just strolled into the dining-room and saw pictures in the fire together.

* * * * * *

There was no trial and no scandal ; there were rumors, and that was all. Max remained true to his fancy for Carrie, and gave proof of his sincerity by settling down to work in a merchant's office, after the manner so dear to his father's heart. And in return, Mr. Wedmore consented to Carrie's being invited down to The Beeches in the spring, to be present at Doreen's wedding.

And when Carrie came, several details concerning the life led by her and the supposed Mrs. Higgs in the house by the docks came to light, and the last remains of the mystery were cleared away.

She told how her father, passing himself off as Mrs. Higgs, an old servant in the Horne family, of whom Carrie had heard in the lifetime of Miss Aldridge, had found her out, had touched her heart by a kindness evidently genuine, and had prevailed upon her to go and make her home in the deserted

house, which, Mrs. Higgs said, had been intended for her by her late master.

In the empty house they found that an entrance had been made into the adjoining warehouse, which had been used by a gang of thieves as a hiding-place for stolen goods. In the little front shop these ingenious persons had fashioned an ingenious hiding-place by hollowing out a tunnel to the river. Into this tunnel the water flowed at high tide ; but when the tide was low an entrance could be effected from the river, by which the thieves could pass in and out, and in which they could safely deposit, in a chest in the slimy earth, property too valuable to be left above ground.

Carrie explained how Mrs. Higgs fraternized with the thieves, before she herself guessed who they were, and how she had got used to them before she learned their character, though not before she had grown suspicious about them How she had seen Dudley with Mrs. Higgs, without knowing who he was, and how she had set him down as a suspicious character from the furtive manner of his visits. How she herself posted the two letters, the one to Edward Jacobs and the other to Dudley, which brought them to the place on the same day. How she herself was sent out of the way on that occasion, and returned in time to witness, through the hole in the

floor above, the stooping over the body by Dudley, and his drawing back covered with blood, which she took for the actual murder. How Mrs. Higgs and Dudley had then left the house together, while she was too sick with fright to move. How she had remained outside the house until she saw Max; and how, when he was gone, and Mrs. Higgs had come back, she found that the manner of the supposed old woman had changed toward her and grown unbearably cruel and harsh. How she had been left for days and nights by herself, until she resolved to bear it no longer. And how, when Mrs. Higgs had sent her to Dudley's chambers with the message about Dick Barker, she had told her never to come back again.

Carrie added that she herself had always been treated with kindness, not only by the gang, of whom, indeed, they saw little, but by such of the men and boys on the barges which came to the wharf as knew her, and "winked" at her unauthorized tenancy of the deserted house.

In broad daylight, in the company of half a dozen policemen, Max and Dudley revisited the house together. They found the holes in the wall through which "Mrs. Higgs" took stock of Max on the occasion of his first visit; they tested the ingenious device by means of which the middle

boards in the front shop could be made to fall and deposit anything laid upon them in the tunnel beneath. They found the hole in which Mrs. Higgs had stepped, and the pole which had been used to underpin the middle boards. This hole extended under the floor of the kitchen, so that by creeping under the flooring from the one room to the other the pole could be withdrawn or replaced without the knowledge of a person in the front room.

This final discovery explained to Max the manner in which the body of Jacobs had been made to disappear while he himself was in the room with it.

The gang, of which the illustrious Dick Barker had formed one, had wisely diappeared, never to return.

But one day, when Carrie, in her nurse's dress, was walking along Oxford Street, in the company of Max, to whom, with Mr. Wedmore's permission, she was now engaged, she felt a hand in her pocket, and turning quickly, found that she was having her purse stolen, "for auld lang syne," by Dick Barker.

Max recognized in the well-dressed young man, with the low type of face, the man whom he had once supposed to be his rival.

As Dick promptly disappeared, Carrie and Max looked at each other, and the girl burst into tears.

"Oh, Max, if it hadn't been for you—" whispered she, as she dried her eyes quickly and hurried on with him.

"And, oh, Carrie, if it hadn't been for you—" whispered Max back, as he took her into the shop of the Hungarian Bread Company, and made her have a cup of tea.

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